USA TODAY WEEKEND

NATION'S NEWS | $3 | JANUARY 3-5, 2025

ROBERT DEUTSCH/ USA TODAY

Remembering Jimmy Carter

Special commemorative section examines his presidential legacy, faith and philanthropy.

In Weekend Extra

JESSE GRANT/GETTY IMAGES FOR IHEARTRADIO

New host, network for Golden Globes

See who leads the nominations, how comic Nikki Glaser is getting ready to host on Sunday. **In Life**

Ohio State's Smith shines in Rose Bowl

Freshman receiver had seven catches for 187 yards, two TDs in victory over Oregon. **In Sports**

Can new Congress deliver results?

Despite GOP trifecta, divisions play a role

Riley Beggin
USA TODAY

Lawmakers are kicking off a new, two-year session of Congress on Friday, and Republicans will be in charge in the House and Senate.

Whether they can take advantage of the trifecta to pass GOP priorities – including President-elect Donald Trump's campaign promises – will depend on their ability to overcome internal divisions that have paralyzed them in the past.

Republicans say they're ready to work together to tackle a full load of legislative priorities, from paring down government spending to passing Trump's agenda on tax cuts, oil and gas production, mass deportations and more.

House Speaker Mike Johnson hopes to lead the House again, and he has the support of the president-elect. RICHARD PIERRIN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

But delivering on their goals may not be easy. Republicans have a tiny majority in the House, and every lawmaker has their own priorities. That means just a few members can derail even must-pass legislation.

And Trump has already demonstrated to lawmakers how quickly he can force them to change their plans: Controversial Cabinet nominees have had Senate Republicans scrambling to appease Trump while weighing fitness for office. House Republicans had a deal to avoid a government shutdown blown up overnight by Trump demanding big changes.

Plus, events can scramble or accelerate any would-be priorities. For example, GOP senators are also highlighting a New Year's Day attack in New Orleans that killed at least 14 people and a fatal Tesla Cybertruck explosion at the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas as an imperative to get the

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Closer look at key vote on Johnson's speakership

If he isn't reelected, resulting limbo could raise complications. **3A**

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FBI: Driver acted alone in a deliberate 'evil act'

Police officers patrol near the site on Bourbon Street in New Orleans where at least 14 people were killed and dozens injured by a man who rammed his truck into a crowd of New Year's revelers early Wednesday. EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

Authorities say they're following hundreds of tips in New Orleans truck attack

John Bacon, Josh Meyer, Trevor Hughes and Jorge Ortiz
USA TODAY

NEW ORLEANS – The New Year's Day truck attack that killed at least 14 people and wounded dozens appears to have been the act of a lone wolf and unrelated to a truck blast in Las Vegas, authorities said Thursday.

The driver in the New Orleans attack, Shamsud-Din Jabbar, was shot to death by police. Christopher Raia, deputy assistant director of the FBI's counterterrorism division, said Thursday that law enforcement officials were following up on more than 400 tips in the case. Raia said a preliminary investigation indicated Jabbar acted alone, although a day earlier FBI special agent Alethea Duncan had said authorities did not believe Jabbar was "solely responsible."

Jabbar, Raia said, posted videos on social media in the hours before the attack saying he had joined the Islamic State group, or ISIS, last year. The videos indicated Jabbar – a 42-year-old U.S. citizen and Army veteran who lived in Houston – initially had planned to harm family and friends but instead decided on an attack that would focus news coverage on the "war between the believers and the disbelievers," Raia said.

"This was an act of terrorism. It was premeditated and an evil act," said Raia, who described Jabbar as "100% inspired by ISIS."

At a White House news briefing with reporters Thursday, President Joe Biden said Jabbar had a remote detonator in his truck that was supposed to set off explosive devices he placed in two ice

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MORE INSIDE AND ONLINE

Visitors are left shaken

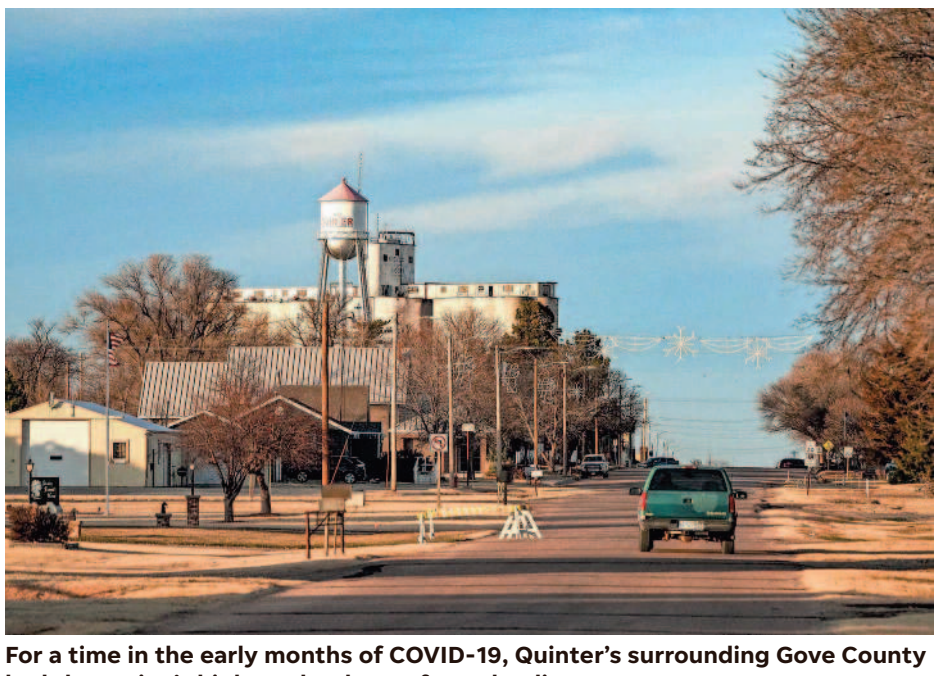
"You just feel bad for the city and everyone in it." **2A**

Live updates

Follow the story at **usatoday.com.**

COVID's indelible mark on one small town

Five years after pandemic, Quinter, Kan., still struggles with immeasurable loss



For a time in the early months of COVID-19, Quinter's surrounding Gove County had the nation's highest death rate from the disease. TREVOR HUGHES/USA TODAY

Trevor Hughes
USA TODAY

QUINTER, Kan. – Joni Kerns coughed behind her surgical mask as she greeted a customer at the Dairy Queen she has owned here for 25 years.

Kerns is suffering through her sixth bout of COVID-19, this time caught, she thinks, on a bucket-list trip to Las Vegas.

"Surviving so far," she said. "Still among the living."

Five years after the coronavirus began spreading around the world, it is still shaping how Americans live, work, eat and connect with neighbors. The virus was first flagged for international attention on Jan. 1, 2020.

Nationwide, the pandemic sparked furious battles over masks, social distancing, school and business closures, and vaccine mandates.

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Massive winter storm to hit much of US

Snow, ice in forecast for Plains, Mid-Atlantic

Gabe Hauari
USA TODAY

A massive winter storm is expected to bring "significant wintry weather" from the Central Plains to the Mid-Atlantic beginning later this week.

The National Weather Service said Thursday morning there is growing confidence the storm will begin impacting the Central Plains by late Saturday, the Ohio and Tennessee valleys on Sunday, and the Mid-Atlantic region early next week.

The weather service says that heavy lake-enhanced snow is likely for areas downwind of the Great Lakes over the next few days, with 6-12 inches of snow with isolated higher amounts possible by Saturday morning.

Additionally, a low-pressure system tracking across the central U.S. is expected to produce a light swath of snowfall from Iowa across the Ohio Valley on Thursday and into the Central Appalachians on Friday. Snowfall accumulations of 6-12 inches are possible over the Central Appalachians, according to the weather service.

The National Weather Service said Thursday morning there is growing confidence the storm will begin impacting the Central Plains by late Saturday, the Ohio and Tennessee valleys on Sunday, and the Mid-Atlantic region early next week.

The weather service said areas in the Central Plains and Mississippi Valley, especially along and north of Interstate 70, have a high chance of seeing at least 6 inches of snow. Further south, the weather service says there are concerns about potentially significant sleet and freezing rain affecting eastern Kansas and the Ozarks, which may extend eastward to the Tennessee and lower Ohio valleys this weekend.

"Some icing may also occur in parts of the southern Appalachians on Sunday," the weather service said.

AccuWeather meteorologists say a major snowstorm is forecast from a "large part of Nebraska to southern and central Ohio and West Virginia," and that "enough snow to shovel and plow (3-6 inches or more) will extend for about 1,000 miles from western Nebraska to West Virginia."

Cities expected to see many inches of snow include St. Louis, Kansas City, Indianapolis and Cincinnati, among others. The areas most likely to see the highest snowfall accumulations are somewhere from northern Missouri to west-central Illinois to northeastern Kansas, according to AccuWeather.

Cold temperatures coming for Central and Eastern US

The weather service also says that high pressure is expected to build over the Great Plains, sending "frigid arctic air" down through the Central and Eastern U.S. through the weekend.

AccuWeather meteorologists are warning that round after found of arctic air is "poised to plunge into the central and eastern United States," with each outbreak having the potential to bring colder air farther south than the previous round.

This could lead to a surge in energy demands and the risk of freeze-related damage in the Southern U.S., according to AccuWeather.

"The magnitude and extent of the Arctic air will build into the first full week of January and linger through the middle of the month and will, at times, affect more than 250 million people living in more than 40 states in the Central and Eastern regions," according to AccuWeather forecasters.

Deadly truck attack shakes tourists in New Orleans

Aaron Gonsoulin
USA TODAY NETWORK

NEW ORLEANS – Tourists who traveled to New Orleans for the Sugar Bowl said they felt the impact of Wednesday's deadly attack when an armed man drove a speeding truck into a crowd during New Year's Eve celebrations.

Fans of the Notre Dame Fighting Irish and Georgia Bulldogs who had been eagerly awaiting the football game Wednesday were awakened by the news of the attack, which the FBI is investigating as a terrorist act. The game was postponed to Thursday at 3 p.m. local time, forcing visitors to make new plans.

Throughout the city, visitors and residents alike felt the effects of the New Year's Day attack.

"We're very somber," said Coleman Sapp, who was visiting the city with friends and family from Georgia for the game. "You could hear a pin drop on Bourbon Street."

Sapp said he was staying at a hotel near where the attack took place. He and his family were flying out Friday, so they planned to attend despite their feelings about what had happened.

While Sapp and his family planned on staying for the game and beyond, Mark Zacharias, of Pensacola, Florida, who was also visiting to watch the Bulldogs, said he didn't know whether he would be able to stay.

He said if the game were played on Thursday night, he "probably won't be able to make it."

Zacharias said he was staying at the Homewood Suites by Hilton in New Orleans. He and his family hadn't checked into the hotel yet, so he was waiting to determine what his next step would be. He said that no matter what he decided, there were bigger things to worry about.

"It's a tragedy," Zacharias said. "I'm a little disappointed that I will not be able to make it."

This was Zacharias' first time in New Orleans. He said the vibe around the city was not what he imagined it to be.

"I always pictured it a lot more lively," Zacharias said. "There's a lot of people, but it just doesn't feel like that mood I expected."

Mike and Amy Johnson talk about the attack on Wednesday. They are in New Orleans for the college football playoff game. SCOTT CLAUSE/USA TODAY NETWORK

Mike and Amy Johnson, of Iowa, are fans of the Irish and were staying close to Bourbon Street at the Courtyard New Orleans French Quarter/Iberville. The two said they spent more than an hour rescheduling their flights after the news that the game was postponed.

Mike Johnson said he and his wife were on Bourbon Street at midnight, only a few hours before the attack. "It's just surreal," he said.

"You just feel bad for the city and everyone in it," Amy Johnson said.

Aaron Gonsoulin is a trending reporter for The Lafayette, La. Daily Advertiser.

New Orleans

Continued from Page 1A

coolers on Bourbon Street. They did not detonate.

Authorities also were investigating a possible act of terror in Las Vegas after a Tesla Cybertruck parked just outside the Trump International Hotel exploded Wednesday, killing a person in the vehicle and injuring several bystanders. Spencer Evans, the FBI's special agent in charge, told reporters a connection to a terrorist organization has not been found.

Also, FBI officials said Thursday that there was no connection between the two attacks that they could discern. "At this point, there is no definitive link between the attack here in New Orleans and the one in Las Vegas," Raia said.

The vehicles involved in the Las Vegas explosion and New Orleans attack were both rented from Turo, the company confirmed Wednesday. Turo said its trust and safety team was working with law enforcement to "share any information that could be helpful in their investigations."

Biden met with his homeland security team Thursday in the White House for an update on the investigation into the New Orleans attack.

Law enforcement and city officials have not publicly identified any of the victims in the New Orleans attack, but family, friends and employers have said that among the dead are Kareem Badawi; Martin "Tiger" Bech, 28; Drew Dauphin; Nikyra Cheyenne Dedeaux, 18; Billy DiMaio, 25; Hubert Gauthreaux, 21; Reggie Hunter, 37; Nicole Perez, 27; and Matthew Tenedorio, 25.

No 'credible threat' on record

Authorities assessed no "credible threat" to New Orleans' New Year's events before the attack, according to a joint Louisiana and New Orleans police threat assessment obtained by Reuters. The document is dated December 2024 and notes there was no credible threat from international terrorists, homegrown violent extremists or domestic violent extremists.

The document notes, however, that "unaffiliated lone offenders and homegrown violent extremists" are of particular concern because of their ability to "remain undetected until operational." The police departments also say foreign terrorist organizations and their affiliates "continue to call on individuals to conduct independent attacks in the U.S" using improvised explosive devices and vehicles.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry inspects Bourbon Street in New Orleans' French Quarter on Thursday after the deadly attack early New Year's Day. Federal authorities turned the street back over to local control on Thursday. ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Meanwhile, officials in New Orleans said security barriers, or bollards, along Bourbon Street had been malfunctioning and were in the process of being replaced ahead of the city hosting Super Bowl 59 on Feb. 9, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell said at a news conference Wednesday.

New Orleans Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick noted that police had been aware of the security concerns and did "harden those target areas where the bollards" had been placed. But the suspect was able to drive around the security measures and onto the sidewalk, according to Kirkpatrick.

Who was Shamsud-Din Jabbar?

Jabbar enlisted in the Army in 2007 and served in Afghanistan from February 2009 to January 2015, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Jabbar was stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska and what was then Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

Jabbar started as a human resource specialist handling payroll, mail and medals. He transitioned to an information technology specialist, a common move in the Army. After deployment, he joined the Army Reserve and was an IT specialist until July 2020. He left as a staff sergeant with an honorable discharge, according to the official.

Media has swarmed the northern Houston street where he lived, a predominantly Muslim community of double-wide and mobile homes, according to a neighbor who asked not to be named. He said his last sighting of Jabbar was on New Year's Eve morning, loading a white pickup.

The neighbor said nothing looked suspicious, and what Jabbar was packing in the vehicle looked like "handheld items." Jabbar was a calm, "nonviolent" neighbor who moved in more than a year ago but had said he planned to move to Louisiana, the man said.

Personal, financial struggles

Court records show Jabbar has been divorced twice and faced financial difficulties during legal battles with his wives. Two years ago, while negotiating his second divorce, his attorney submitted documents showing his limited finances.

"Time is of the essence. I cannot afford the house payment. It is past due in excess of $27,000 and in danger of foreclosure if we delay settling the divorce," Jabbar wrote to his attorney in January 2022.

Jabbar stated his two real estate companies had no worth. He mentioned his two children and proposed $1,100 a month in child support. His finances included a Deloitte pay stub with a $120,000 salary and more than $41,000 in debts.

One of Jabbar's family members, who did not wish to be identified because of safety concerns, said of the truck attack, "I don't think he did this of his own free will."

"I could never see him doing that," the family member said. "Maybe he just went … If he did … he may have just went crazy.

"I just don't see it happening."

Contributing: Thao Nguyen, Tom Vanden Brook, Bart Jansen, Claire Thornton and Joey Garrison, USA TODAY; Reuters

USA TODAY
Volume 43, No. 77

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Will Speaker Mike Johnson lose his job?

Some GOP lawmakers wary as key vote looms

Riley Beggin
USA TODAY

Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., speaks to the press at the Capitol on Dec. 20 in Washington, DC. KENT NISHIMURA/GETTY IMAGES

WASHINGTON – Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has already spent more than a year trying to organize a group of House Republicans for whom infighting and chaos have become the norm.

But that challenge pales in comparison with the gauntlet that could await him on Friday when he will try to hold on to his position and lead House Republicans through two more years under a second Donald Trump presidency where his party also holds control of the Senate. The vote to elect the next speaker comes as the GOP will have even smaller margins of power.

The soft-spoken speaker – who himself came into power after former Speaker Kevin McCarthy was toppled in a GOP revolt – has his conference's nominal support after winning a vote in November.

But a tumultuous, last-minute spending deal to avoid a government shutdown in December has prompted a handful of Republicans to publicly question whether they will vote for Johnson to serve another term in leadership, raising the possibility that the House will be frozen in limbo for days or weeks without a speaker. That could create complications for the certification of electoral votes on Jan. 6 and with Trump's inauguration fast approaching on Jan. 20.

Members can't tackle any other business until someone is chosen. Johnson has noted this and said Congress should get organized quickly for national security purposes, citing the fatal truck attack in New Orleans early in the morning on New Year's Day.

Whether Johnson emerges with the same leadership title may depend on Trump's endorsement. The former and future president threw his weight behind the Louisiana Republican on Monday, saying in a statement on Truth Social that Johnson has his "Complete & Total Endorsement."

"Speaker Mike Johnson is a good, hard working, religious man," Trump wrote. "He will do the right thing, and we will continue to WIN."

How is a speaker elected?

When the House convenes on Friday, they'll immediately begin voting to elect a speaker.

A speaker is elected when a majority of House members vote for the same person. On Friday, that will be a threshold of 218 votes. Republicans will have 219 members and Democrats will have 215.

Members can vote for either party's nominee – Johnson for the Republicans, and current House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., for the Democrats. They can also vote for anyone else (even if they don't serve in the House), withhold their vote, or vote "present." Voting "present" means technically casting a ballot without supporting a specific person.

If no one candidate receives 218 votes, they vote again.

Why might Johnson lose?

At least one House Republican – Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky. – has said he will not support Johnson on Friday no matter what.

All House Democrats are expected to vote for Jeffries, so Johnson must win every other Republican member's vote to become speaker.

That gives each Republican lawmaker significant leverage to force concessions from Johnson in exchange for their vote. For example, votes on favored bills or promises to approach government spending negotiations differently. At least one House Republican, Rep. Victoria Spartz of Indiana, has already released a list of demands for Johnson.

But some members still may not want to support him, or prefer other candidates, such as Rep. Tom Emmer, R-Minn., the No. 3 Republican leader in the House. House Judiciary Chairman Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, a founding member of the ultraconservative House Freedom Caucus, could be another option.

Several Republicans are frustrated with Johnson's handling of last month's government funding extension that narrowly dodged a serious shutdown. Johnson first backed a nearly 1,600-page bipartisan spending deal full of unrelated policies just days before the funding deadline, but Trump and ally Elon Musk publicly opposed it.

The final deal was a pared-down funding extension and a promise to raise the debt ceiling in 2025 that dozens of House Republicans voted against.

House Freedom Caucus Chair Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md. and Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., have also said they haven't made up their mind on whether to support Johnson.

So could Johnson still win the speakership?

The last time House Republicans couldn't elect a speaker is not a distant memory for most lawmakers.

When a small group of GOP members joined with Democrats in a historic vote to kick McCarthy out of the speakership in October 2023, the chamber spent three weeks paralyzed and in limbo as they repeatedly failed to coalesce around another Republican. Johnson eventually emerged as a dark-horse conservative that multiple factions could support.

This time, the stakes are higher. Republicans now have a coveted trifecta in Washington, controlling the House, Senate and White House.

Any time spent on internal fights is time they are not able to act on Trump's agenda – creating a powerful incentive to elect a speaker and get on with their GOP priorities.

Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., told ABC on Sunday that ousting McCarthy was "the single stupidest thing I've ever seen in politics."

"Removing Mike Johnson would equally be as stupid," he added. "These folks are playing with fire, and if they think they're somehow going to get a more conservative speaker, they're kidding themselves."

How has Trump's endorsement changed things?

Several House Republicans who had publicly aired doubts about Johnson said they had shifted their thinking following Trump's endorsement on Monday.

"I will be voting for Mike Johnson as Speaker on January 3rd, and any report suggesting otherwise is dead wrong," wrote formerly undecided Rep. Josh Brecheen, R-Okla., on X. "I believe Speaker Johnson and President Donald Trump are the winning combination to deliver results within our window of opportunity."

Another member who had been undecided on Johnson, Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, told Axios that Trump's endorsement "is significant and may save Johnson… If DJT supports Johnson we need to rally around Johnson."

Musk also wrote on X under Trump's endorsement: "I feel the same way! You have my full support."

What happens if Republicans can't elect a speaker?

The House will be stuck until a leader is chosen: No other business can happen in the House without a leader.

If no speaker is chosen by Monday, however, experts disagree on whether Congress can meet to formalize the results of the 2024 presidential election by counting the Electoral College votes. It's a responsibility assigned to Congress in the Constitution.

David Super, an expert on congressional procedure who teaches at Georgetown University, said Congress should still be able to perform its duty without a speaker because the House and Senate will be meeting in a joint session.

Vice President Kamala Harris will be presiding over Trump's win – and her defeat – in the 2024 election.

"It isn't the house meeting as the House. It is the House members and the senators sitting in the House chamber counting electoral votes," he said.

Sarah Wire contributed to this report.

Congress

Continued from Page 1A

president-elect's national security nominees confirmed quickly.

Here's what to expect from the new 119th Congress.

Leadership on thin ice

The first order of business when lawmakers arrive on Capitol Hill Friday will be to formally elect their new leaders. House Speaker Mike Johnson hopes to lead the House again for the next two years, and he has Trump's "complete and total" endorsement

But a few ultraconservative House lawmakers have said they aren't sure whether they'll vote for Johnson again after a spending meltdown paralyzed the House before the holiday break.

Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., has said he won't vote for Johnson no matter what. All Democrats plan to support House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries. That means Johnson must get every other Republican member of Congress to vote for him to keep his crown.

A few other House Republicans say they are still undecided on whether to support Johnson, even after Trump endorsed him. At least one Republican, Rep. Victoria Spartz of Indiana, has publicly released a list of demands she wants in exchange for their vote. Expect more wheeling and dealing before they throw their support behind Johnson – if they do so at all.

Tiny vote margins may be issue

Republicans will have a four-seat majority in the House when Congress convenes, the smallest in modern history.

That ratio will shift throughout the beginning of the year. Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., resigned from the House in November and will not retake his seat, leaving one vacancy as the year begins (a 219-215 majority for Republicans).

Reps. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., and Mike Waltz, R-Fla., plan to leave Congress for roles in the Trump administration, but not until at least Jan. 20, when Trump is inaugurated. That will further narrow the majority temporarily to 217-215.

All three are from districts that are likely to send another Republican to replace their departing member during special elections to replace the departing members. Once that happens, the final Republican majority is expected to be 220-215.

These narrow margins mean the GOP will need nearly total unanimity to get anything through the lower chamber – giving each House Republican significant power to derail any legislation if they disagree with it. That kind of power dynamic has been a challenge for the conference before, as rank-and-file members repeatedly blocked or delayed policy spearheaded by their own leadership in the last Congress.

In the Senate, Republicans will also have a relatively thin 53-47 majority. That's enough to comfortably pass agreed-upon GOP priorities, but not enough to easily approve controversial ones that may lose the support of moderate senators like Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

Case in point: Gaetz dropped out of consideration to be Trump's attorney general when it was clear he could not get enough GOP support to get approved.

Republicans' Senate majority is also not big enough to overcome the 60-vote threshold necessary to overcome the filibuster on most legislation. Republicans plan to pass much of Trump's agenda through a party-line "reconciliation" process, but any other policy will need Democratic support.

A big play for Trump's agenda

Most federal government trifectas last only two years.

Republicans are well aware of this and plan to move quickly to pass ambitious policies that reflect Trump's campaign promises. If done the typical way, most of those policies would hit a dead end in the Senate controlled 53-47 by Republicans, as 60 votes are needed to pass the vast majority of bills.

To get around that, Republicans plan to use a procedure called "reconciliation" to pass their tax and spending-related priorities with a simple majority vote – the same tool Democrats used to push through President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 and a COVID-19 stimulus bill in 2021.

Republicans have said they want to focus on border security, domestic energy production, extending Trump's 2017 tax plan, paring down government spending and more. They may pursue two separate reconciliation packages, focusing on border security first.

Before they left for the holidays, House Republicans added a last-minute wrinkle to that plan. They agreed to pursue raising the debt ceiling as part of the reconciliation process – which is sure to be a politically fraught debate. Raising the debt ceiling pays the federal government's loans on things it has already paid for, and defaulting on the federal debt could have catastrophic consequences. The high-stakes debate regularly stirs up concerns about government spending and likely won't be easily resolved.

Democrats playing the opposition

Democrats will be in the minority in both chambers, denying them powerful committee chairmanships, subpoena power for oversight and investigations without GOP support, and leadership roles that can set the agenda in Congress.

Instead, they'll likely focus on telling the public about what they see as the harmful consequences of Republican policies to rally opposition and potentially bring more voters to their side in the 2026 midterm elections.

In the Senate, they'll be able to throw up roadblocks to legislation they oppose by using the filibuster to create a 60-vote threshold to pass most bills – except the party-line reconciliation bills Republicans plan to use for Trump's priorities.

If Republicans can't agree among themselves enough to take advantage of that tiny majority in the House? Don't expect Democrats to bail them out unless they get something in return.

A constant 2026 midterm threat

Political trifectas typically don't last long for Democrats or Republicans.

The majority party has repeatedly lost control of the House in the first midterm election after gaining across-the-board power in a presidential election: Biden, Trump, former President Barack Obama, and former President Bill Clinton all lost the House after their first two years in office.

Still, lawmakers who are up for reelection in 2026 – all House members and 33 senators – will constantly be looking to deliver for voters in the hopes they can keep their seats in two years.

Only one Senate Republican is running in a state won by Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris in 2024: Collins of Maine. The political map can also easily change in an off-cycle election season where there's no presidential race atop the ticket. In addition, several Republican senators in deeper red states could be vulnerable to primary threats.

Trump and his allies are already leveraging those dynamics in both the House and Senate by threatening to back primary challengers to independent-minded Republicans to try to force them to fall in line.

But some lawmakers are already growing tired of the threats.

"You can't primary" every Republican who votes against spending bills, Massie said after the spending bill passed with 34 Republicans voting against it. "I mean, you can… You'll weed out the weak. But the rest of us will have antibodies."

Officials: Driver shot self before explosion

Motive in Las Vegas blast still being investigated

Jeanine Santucci, Tom Vanden Brook, Bailey Schulz and Eve Chen
USA TODAY

The person who died inside a Tesla Cybertruck that exploded in Las Vegas on New Year's Day sustained a gunshot wound to the head before the blast, officials said Thursday, as the investigation continued into why it happened.

The Cybertruck exploded Wednesday morning while it was parked near Trump International Hotel, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahill said. Seven people were injured. The driver's gunshot wound was believed to be self-inflicted immediately before the detonation, and a handgun was found by the person's feet, McMahill said. He said it is considered a suicide with a bombing that occurred immediately after.

Though authorities said they could not yet definitively identify the person because their remains were badly burned, several identifying documents found inside the vehicle and other records pointed to the suspect as 37-year-old Matthew Livelsberger.

The Army on Wednesday said the truck had been rented by Livelsberger, an active-duty Green Beret and highly decorated combat soldier who served in the Army for nearly 20 years and was awarded the Bronze Star with valor, among several commendations. He had been deployed to Afghanistan from September 2017 to April 2018, and also deployed to Ukraine and the Republics of Congo and Georgia. The Army confirmed Livelsberger died Wednesday.

The remains of a Tesla Cybertruck that exploded at the Trump International Hotel are inspected in Las Vegas on Wednesday. RONDA CHURCHILL/REUTERS

The driver drove the truck up and down Las Vegas Boulevard on Wednesday before pulling in front of the Trump hotel by the valet parking area around 8:40 a.m. The vehicle sat there for about 15 seconds before the explosion, McMahill said.

Police later discovered gasoline and camp fuel canisters and large firework mortars in the back of the vehicle. Also found in the vehicle, according to McMahill, was military identification, a passport, two semi-automatic firearms, an iPhone, smart watch and several credit cards.

Livelsberger rented the Cybertruck on Dec. 28 in Denver, McMahill said Thursday. His movements were traced to Las Vegas using records from Tesla charging stations. Both firearms were purchased legally Dec. 30, said Kenny Cooper, assistant special agent in charge of ATF's San Francisco field division.

A motivation for the explosion was not yet known, according to Spencer Evans, special agent in charge of FBI's Las Vegas division.

"The level of sophistication is not what we would expect from an individual with this type of military experience," he said. "Most of the materials inside that Tesla were fuel to help fuel a greater explosion."

Officials do not have evidence of any other people being involved. "I'm also confident to tell the Las Vegas community and this great nation that we don't believe there's any further threat from this subject or anybody associated to him," McMahill said.

The explosion occurred hours after a deadly attack involving a truck in New Orleans on New Year's Day, and authorities confirmed several similarities between the men. However, federal officials said Thursday they have discovered no evidence of a link between the two incidents.

Jeremy Schwartz, acting special agent in charge for the FBI in Las Vegas, said Wednesday the bureau's joint terrorism task force was investigating the incident as a possible act of terror.

Law enforcement officials including FBI Denver, the Colorado Springs Police Department and the Denver Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were conducting activity at a home in Colorado Springs on Thursday related to the explosion, the FBI said on X.

Unveiled in 2019, the Cybertruck is a battery-powered EV and Tesla's first truck. The vehicle gained attention for its postapocalyptic styling. It was marketed as having a "bullet tough" stainless-steel frame and "basically rockproof" armored glass, according to previous statements from Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

McMahill credited the Cybertruck for directing the blast "up through the truck and out," which "really limited the damage that occurred inside of the valet."

Musk said the blast was unrelated to the 2024 model-year Cybertruck itself.

Contributing: John Bacon, Josh Meyer, Trevor Hughes, Joey Garrison, Swapna Venugopal Ramaswamy, Bart Jansen and Thao Nguyen, USA TODAY

5 missions helped define the year in exploration

Eric Lagatta
USA TODAY

Humanity is in the midst of a new era of spaceflight and cosmic discovery that is only just now beginning to dawn.

In the years ahead, spacefarers will yearn to return to the moon and will embark on deep space missions that will push the boundaries of what we thought possible. Uncrewed spacecraft will reach even more distant destinations of the solar system, where they aim to uncover mysterious and look for any signs that we are not alone in the universe.

Yes, space exploration that was once the realm of science fiction will soon be an imminent reality. And in 2024, NASA, SpaceX and others helped make possible a number of missions that will lay the groundwork.

Here's a look back at five of the most pivotal space missions from 2024.

Uncrewed commercial lunar lander makes history

Humankind's return to the moon may have been delayed by yet another year, but earlier in 2024, an American uncrewed lander did manage to make it back to the lunar surface for the first time in five decades.

The 14-foot-tall Nova-C the lander, nicknamed Odysseus for the hero of Greek myth, touched down Feb. 22, landing in the southernmost location of any lunar craft before it. Built and operated by Houston space company Intuitive Machines, the lander remained functional for a week, collecting data and photos that were beamed back to Earth.

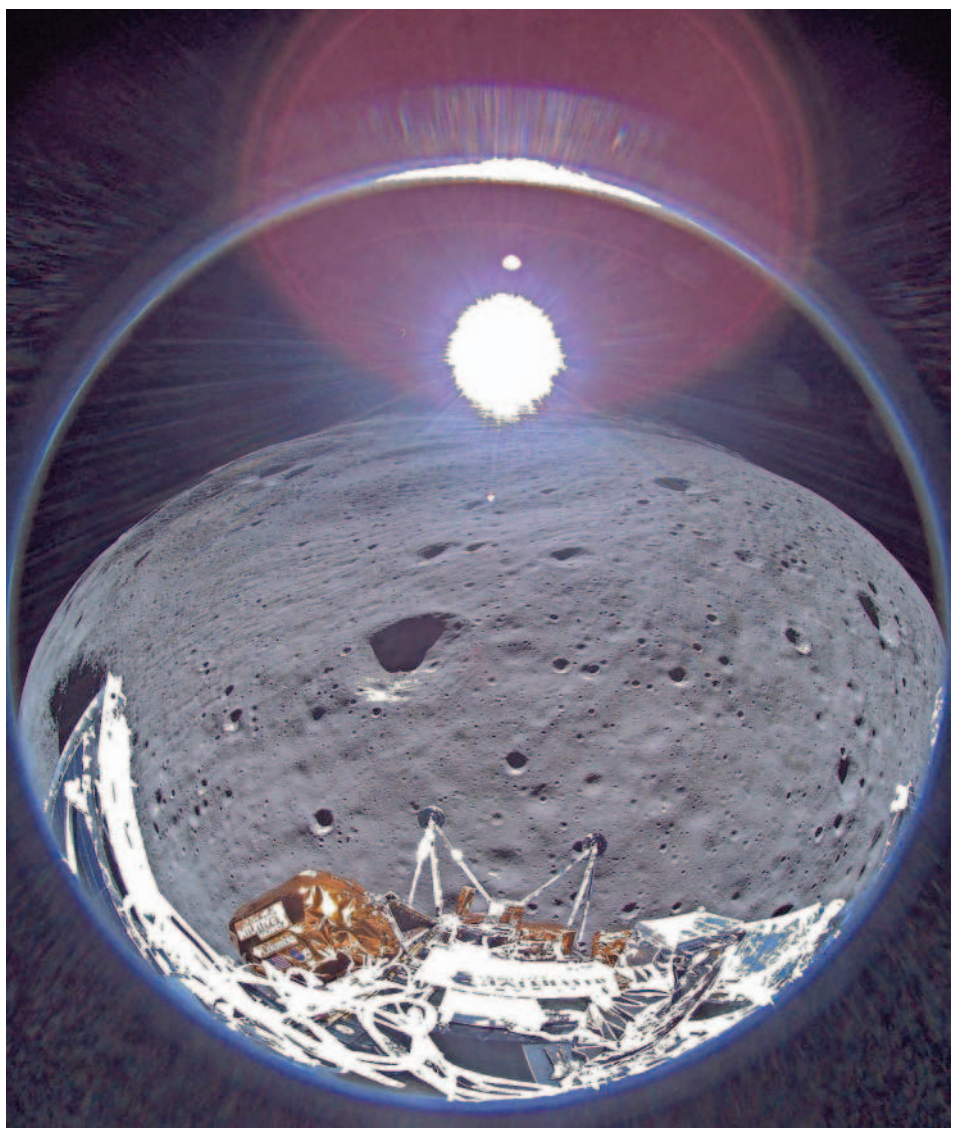
Odysseus' landing not only returned America to the moon for the first time since 1972, but also marked the first time a commercial company built a spacecraft that made it to the lunar surface.

NASA, which helped finance the mission as its primary customer, has indicated that the data collected by its instruments aboard Odysseus will help as the space agency prepares to send astronauts back to the moon under its Artemis program.

Boeing Starliner astronauts delayed at ISS

For years, Boeing had worked to develop an innovative spacecraft that could compete with SpaceX in transporting astronauts to orbit on behalf of NASA.

But when that vehicle, the Starliner, finally was prepared for its first crewed flight test in June, what followed was issue after issue that ultimately ended with the craft forced to abandon the mission's astronauts at the International Space Station.



Intuitive Machines' Odysseus lunar lander sends out its farewell transmission, which was Feb. 22 and received a week later, before its power was depleted. The image shows the crescent Earth in the background viewed from the lunar surface. INTUITIVE MACHINES/AFP VIA GETTY

The crew of the Polaris Dawn mission from left: Anna Menon, Scott Poteet, Jared Isaacman, and Sarah Gillis, are photographed, Aug. 19 during a media briefing after their arrival at Kennedy Space Center in Florida. CRAIG BAILEY/USA TODAY NETWORK

A SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket lifts off from Kennedy Space Center, Fla., on Oct. 14, carrying the Europa Clipper spacecraft for NASA. CRAIG BAILEY/USA TODAY NETWORK

Instead, Boeing's competitor, SpaceX, has been tasked with returning those astronauts, NASA veterans Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore, in February aboard its Dragon vehicle.

The Boeing Starliner undocked autonomously Sept. 6 and managed to land just fine in New Mexico desert. But if the vehicle is ever to become NASA's second operational private spacecraft to carry astronauts and cargo to the space station, it has ahead of it more ground tests and potential modifications to prepare it for routine spaceflight.

SpaceX ramps up Starship tests

SpaceX ramped up testing this year of its massive Starship rocket, which flew on four more demonstrations, including a final one for 2024 in front of President-elect Donald Trump.

All six flight tests so far of the super heavy-lift launch vehicle, lauded as the biggest and most powerful rocket ever built, have generally improved with each iteration. But one of the pivotal accomplishments this year for SpaceX came Oct. 13 when the rocket booster was able to steer autonomously back to the landing pad, where it was caught with two giant mechanical arms.

SpaceX called off an attempt to replicate the maneuver in its Nov. 19 demonstration, citing unspecified safety concerns.

The 400-foot behemoth, composed of both a 165-foot Starship spacecraft itself and the 232-foot "Super Heavy" rocket, is due in the years ahead to play a pivotal role in NASA's lunar ambitions and future deep space flight.

Under NASA's plans, Artemis III astronauts aboard the Orion capsule would board the Starship while in orbit for a ride to the lunar surface. SpaceX CEO Elon Musk also has grand ambitions of sending the first Starships to Mars in late 2026, the next time that Earth and Mars line up, followed by crewed flights in 2028.

Astronauts conduct historic spacewalk on Polaris Dawn mission

In September, a crew of four commercial astronauts launched on the Polaris Dawn mission, which became a space flight for the history books.

On Sept. 10, a crew under the command of billionaire Jared Isaacman boarded a SpaceX Dragon capsule, hitching a ride for a five-day trip through space atop a Falcon 9 rocket. Isaacman, who funded the mission along with SpaceX, led a team that included pilot Scott "Kidd" Poteet and mission specialists Sarah Gillis and Anna Menon.

The mission was filled with landmark moments, from the records heights they reached on the day of the launch to the pioneering spacewalk they were able to complete. Prior to the Polaris Dawn, the only spacefarers to ever exit their vehicles and expose themselves to the vacuum of space were government astronauts.

But the milestones they reached weren't just for bragging rights: The Polaris Dawn crew helped to set the stage for future deep space exploration, much of which will increasingly rely on private companies like SpaceX.

The mission may have even helped put Isaacman on the radar of Trump, who nominated him earlier in December to become NASA's next administrator.

NASA launches Europa Clipper spacecraft to study moon of Jupiter

Europa, the fourth largest of Jupiter's 95 moons, is widely regarded among scientists as one of the best places in the solar system to look for signs of life.

That's why for years, NASA had been planning and developing a flagship mission to send an uncrewed spacecraft to scour the celestial body for clues.

Though Hurricane Milton forced a slight delay, the Europa Clipper at long last launched on a SpaceX rocket Oct. 14 on a 1.8 billion-mile journey to its namesake moon. When it enters Jupiter's orbit in April 2030, the Clipper will spend four years mapping and scanning above and beneath Europa's surface.

But the Clipper is not necessarily looking to discover life itself; just the conditions that could support it.

Though Europa is slightly smaller than Earth's own moon and barely one-quarter the diameter of Earth, beneath its cracked, ridged surface is a vast salty ocean that could be up to 100 miles deep and have twice the volume as Earth's oceans combined. Scientists have long theorized that the icy crust above the ocean conceals evidence of organic compounds and energy sources – the ingredients of life.

Eric Lagatta covers breaking and trending news for USA TODAY. Reach him at elagatta@gannett.com

‘Gen Beta’ starting its generational journey

Greta Cross
USA TODAY

Babies born this year, and for the 14 years following, will make up the newest generation: Generation Beta.

Its members will explore new digital landscapes, many of which we likely can’t fathom now, and see the next century.

Members of Gen Beta, for short, will be the children of younger millennials and older Gen Zers.

By 2035, experts say they are estimated to make up at least 16% of the global population, according to McCrindle, an Australian social researcher led by generational analyst Mark McCrindle.

And many Gen Beta members likely will live into the 22nd century.

Babies born in 2025 will be 76 years old when the year 2101 comes around.

Here’s what to know about Generation Beta and those that came before.

What years will Gen Beta be born?

Members of Gen Beta will be born between 2025 and 2039, according to McCrindle.

Why ‘Beta’?

Generation Beta follows Generation Alpha, in line with the Greek alphabet.

How will technology affect Gen Beta?

McCrindle predicts that digital and physical life will be seamless for Gen Beta. While members of Gen Alpha have become acquainted with smart technology and artificial intelligence, Gen Beta will experience AI and automation in every aspect of life, from school to work to health care and entertainment, McCrindle says.

As technology continues to rapidly advance, Gen Z parents are likely to be more cautious with how their children interact with the digital world. According to McCrindle, 36% of Gen Z parents, compared with 30% of millennial parents, strongly agree that children’s screen time should be limited.

Pressures of climate change with eco-conscious parents

Gen Beta will be asked to manage life through climate change, global population shifts and rapid urbanization, McCrindle states. But members of this generation also will be raised by eco-conscious millennial and Gen Z parents who prioritize adaptability.

According to the Pew Research Center, 71% of millennials and 67% of Gen Zers believe climate change should be the top priority to ensure a sustainable planet for the future.

Generation names for past 100 years

The start and end of a new generation is sometimes vague, but these generation group names are often used for individuals born between the following years:

- **Greatest Generation:** 1901-1927
- **Silent Generation:** 1928-1945 (age 80+)
- **Baby Boomers:** 1946-1964 (age 61-79)
- **Generation X:** 1965-1979 (age 46-60)
- **Millennials:** 1980-1994 (age 31-45)
- **Generation Z:** 1995-2009 (age 16-30)
- **Gen Alpha:** 2010-2024 (age 15 and younger)

What will the next generation be called, after Gen Beta?

If naming conventions continue the current trend, it is likely that the next generational group will be Generation Gamma, according to McCrindle. This generation will likely represent those born between 2040 and 2054.

Look up and you may see the first meteor shower of 2025

Eric Lagatta
USA TODAY

The first meteor shower of the New Year also has the potential to be one of the year’s best – if the weather cooperates.

But astronomers lament that the Quadrantid meteors tend to fall short of expectations because of the comparatively short length of their maximum activity and the obscuring wintry conditions of early January.

That doesn’t mean the cosmic display – one of the few meteor showers to be caused by debris from an asteroid instead of a comet – isn’t worth seeking out. Stargazers could be treated to a host of bright fireballs and the sight of multiple meteors per hour whizzing across the night sky at more than 25 miles per second when the Quadrantids reach their peak.

Here’s what to know about the Quadrantid meteor shower, including when it peaks and what causes it.

When can you see the Quadrantid meteor shower?

Meteor showers occur on a predictable schedule each year, with some lasting for mere days and others stretching on for weeks.

A meteor shower is at its best when the Earth passes through the densest part of the associated cosmic debris. That window, otherwise known as the shower’s peak activity, is when stargazers will want to be on the lookout for meteors.

The Quadrantids began zipping through the skies on Dec. 26 and will continue through Jan. 16, according to the American Meteor Society.

But while most meteor showers have a two-day peak, the Quadrantids’ maximum activity only lasts a few hours – making the meteors much more difficult to spot, according to NASA.

For stargazers, that means the best time to catch the Quadrantid meteors will be in the predawn hours Thursday night into Friday morning, astronomers say.

Timeanddate.com offers a detailed schedule for when to see the Quadrantids.

How to watch the Quadrantids

The Quadrantids are best viewed from the Northern Hemisphere and are not well seen from the Southern Hemisphere.

During its peak, anywhere from 60 to 200 Quadrantid meteors can be seen per hour under ideal conditions, according to NASA. While the meteors are known to lack persistent tails, they often produce bright fireballs, which are larger explosions of light persisting longer than an average meteor streak.

The meteors seem to emerge – or radiate – from an obsolete constellation called “Quadrans Muralis” that today is located between the constellations of Bootes and Draco near the end of the handle of the Big Dipper, NASA says. Both the constellation and the shower are named after the quadrant, an early astronomical instrument used to observe and plot star positions.

Astronomers caution that the radiant is not a good guide for where stargazers should look to view the streaking meteors, which should be visible.

What causes the meteors?

Meteor showers occur when Earth passes through dusty debris trails left by comets and other space objects as they orbit the sun. The debris collides with Earth’s atmosphere at high speed and disintegrates, creating fiery and colorful streaks in the sky, NASA says.

Those resulting fireballs, or “shooting stars,” are meteors. If meteoroids survive their trip to Earth, they are called meteorites, NASA says.

Unlike most meteor showers, the Quadrantid meteor shower doesn’t originate from a comet, but from an asteroid.

HISTORY
IN THE MAKING

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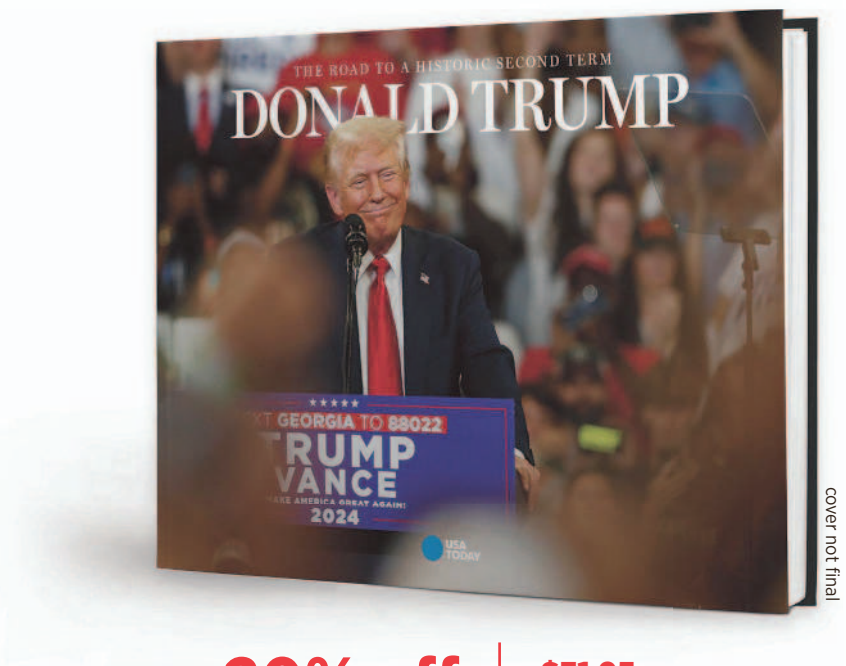

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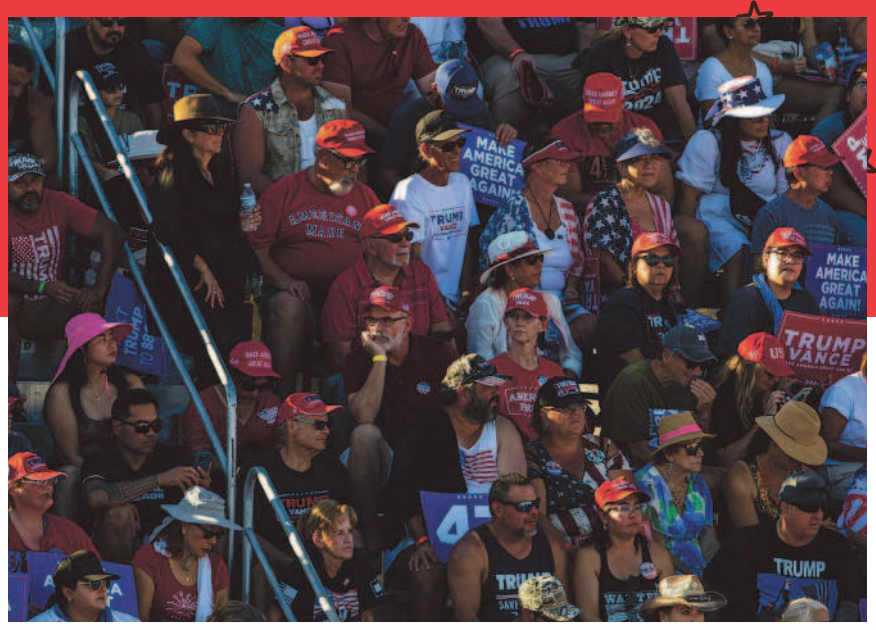

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USA TODAY

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10 hurt in New Year's Day shooting outside NY nightclub

Eric Lagatta
USA TODAY

Ten people were injured in a New Year's Day mass shooting in New York City when a group of men opened fire on a crowd of people standing outside a nightclub in Queens, according to police.

The nightclub is called Amazura, according to reports by ABC7, Fox5, and other outlets.

New York police were dispatched at 11:18 p.m. Thursday to the venue on 144th Place after receiving multiple 911 calls about the attack, NYPD Chief of Patrol Philip Rivera told reporters. While Rivera said the shooting was not a terror attack, he told reporters that detectives are investigating whether it was gang-related.

All the victims sustained non-life-threatening injuries, Rivera said.

"There's zero tolerance for these senseless shootings, these horrible acts of violence on our streets," Rivera said in a brief media conference at the scene, which the NYPD shared on X. "And those responsible for this crime will be apprehended and brought to justice."

Shooting targeted people outside private event

The shooting took place outside a venue where about 90 people had gathered upstairs for a private event. Approximately another 15 people were outside awaiting entry when either three or four male suspects opened fire on the crowd, Rivera said.

The suspects then fled west on 91st Avenue, where they got into a light-colored sedan with out-of-state plates on 143rd Place, Rivera said.

Investigators believe that more than 30 shots were fired into the crowd, but Rivera said detectives were still processing ballistics evidence to determine an accurate number.

Of the 10 people injured in the shooting, six were females, and four were males. The victims, who were between the ages of 16 and 20, were treated at nearby hospitals and were expected to survive, Rivera said.

The Dairy Queen in rural Quinter, Kan., is one of the town's only full-service restaurants open daily and is a popular stop for travelers on Interstate 70. The nearest big city, Denver, is about 250 miles west; Kansas City is 300 miles to the east. PHOTOS BY TREVOR HUGHES/USA TODAY

COVID

Continued from Page 1A

In rural Quinter, as elsewhere across the country, the months after COVID-19's arrival ignited a still-simmering battle over the proper role of government in managing public health, fomented distrust between longtime neighbors and weakened community bonds. People stopped speaking to each other. Some refused to patronize a restaurant that tried to enforce mask rules, and it closed for lack of customers. Health care workers quit in frustration and fear.

Kerns said COVID-19 worsened her diabetes and her husband's hearing and led to heart problems for her daughter.

Still, she stopped getting vaccinated after the initial round. Right now, she also has the flu – she said she'll get that vaccine next time, but not one for COVID-19, even though she knows the risk of long COVID, with its brain fog, breathlessness and other lingering symptoms.

"I just feel that God's in control here. If he says it's my time, it's my time," she said, coughing again.

Joni Kerns, who owns the Quinter Dairy Queen, says she has had COVID-19 six times. She's trying to sell the restaurant, and she worries about the future of her hometown after the pandemic. "COVID really changed us," she says.

A fractured community

For a time in late 2020, Quinter's surrounding Gove County had the nation's highest COVID-19 death rate, driven in large part by an outbreak of deaths in the community's nursing home. In a span of days, 17 elderly residents died out of a population of just 2,600.

Statewide, about 10,000 Kansans and more than 1.2 million Americans died from the virus, according to federal health officials. About 3.5% of Americans have symptoms that linger more than 3 months after COVID-19 infections, according to a study in December.

For the first few months of the pandemic, residents in places like Quinter told themselves the worst would pass them by. The nearest big city, Denver, is about 250 miles west, and Kansas City is 300 miles to the east. But Interstate 70 runs along Quinter's bottom edge, and Kerns' Dairy Queen is a popular stop for travelers.

And although Quinter has a small grocery store and a Dollar General, residents who want anything from Walmart or other stores have to make a 50-mile drive east or west.

No one is exactly sure how and when the coronavirus first arrived in Quinter, but by early November 2020, it was killing nursing home residents, among them the town's unofficial historian and a longtime community volunteer. Experts had predicted elderly people with preexisting conditions would be most at risk. And like many rural communities, the residents of Gove County are on average older, poorer and sicker than their urban counterparts.

In a community small enough for people to know which of their neighbors are taking weight loss drugs, what car everyone drives, and what they're probably going to order for takeout at Melanie's Kitchen Asian Cuisine, it's hard to avoid running into one another.

"People are still angry," said Undersheriff Mike Haase. "I know there's relationships that were ruined because of choices made during COVID."

Haase is still coping with the loss of longtime Gove County Sheriff Allan Weber, who died in December 2020 in a Denver hospital after a two-month battle with COVID-19. During the pandemic, Haase was one of a core group of community leaders who ran the county's Emergency Operations Center. He remains frustrated that efforts to protect community health spiraled into vicious political battles when people were dying.

"I lost some pretty good friends and a damn good boss," Haase said.

In August 2020, just before deaths began, Gove County leaders ordered everyone to wear masks in public, then backtracked two weeks later after a series of angry confrontations with their constituents.

Around the same time, someone anonymously reported the county's COVID-19 information Facebook page as "fake news," and it was temporarily taken offline just as public officials were trying to warn residents of the danger. A high school teacher who offered extra credit to students who got vaccinated was nearly fired.

Local officials say the problems were exacerbated by then-President Donald Trump's inconsistent messaging about the effectiveness of masks, the danger posed by the infection and even the wisdom of being vaccinated**,** though he had funded the vaccine's development. Trump won Gove County with 88% of the vote in 2020 and 2024.

Like many small communities, Gove County is far more conservative than America as a whole, in part because of the presence of the Dunkard Brethren, a Protestant faith from Germany. Members of that church wear plain, anachronistic clothing, including bonnets and long dresses for women, and reject having television in their homes.

Rural America at a crossroads

Keith Orejel, a history professor and expert on rural America, said research indicates that the coronavirus may ultimately be seen as a "particularly cruel capstone" to the struggles faced by communities like Quinter, where the paved roads of the small downtown quickly run out into dirt roads cutting through corn and sorghum fields.

The number of people living in rural areas nationally has been slowly declining, he said, as jobs increasingly shift to urban areas. Orajel, a professor at Wilmington College in Ohio, said COVID-19 sparked a small bump in rural populations as people who could work remotely online moved to small towns, but he predicted that would ultimately reverse.

COVID-19 was particularly dangerous to the fabric of small towns, he said, because social distancing restrictions interrupted long-standing patterns of volunteerism and community connections. He said the generally older residents who participated in things like the Elks club or planning commission meetings – the lifeblood of small towns – found themselves socially isolated and in general just stopped participating.

"Once you get out of volunteerism, it's really hard to get back," Orajel said. "Those were trends that have been impacting rural communities forever, and especially in the last couple decades, and it's very, very likely that COVID aggravated that."

Haase, the undersheriff, sees the loss of that community daily. In addition to working as one of a handful of law enforcement officers, Haase also runs the local ambulance service and struggles to find neighbors willing to volunteer. That's a problem, he said, because Gove County has seen more drug overdoses since the pandemic hit.

He said he also has seen an increase in mental health struggles, and, from his position as a deputy, a loss in respect for law enforcement and government in general.

"There are people who I know don't like me, and I'm still going to help them," he said. "You're not really looking at a popularity contest. You're looking at trying to save the most lives possible."

One of the Quinter institutions most battered by the pandemic is the Gove County Medical Center, a small complex of low buildings on the town's west side. It's the area's single-largest employer, with about 160 workers. And because it also ran the nursing home, it has remained a flashpoint of both hope and frustration within the community.

Hospital administrators in summer 2023 closed down the nursing home, arguing that federal care reimbursements weren't keeping pace with costs, which put the hospital's overall finances at risk. By closing the 29-resident unit, the hospital stabilized its budget, said Gove County Medical Center CEO Conner Fiscarelli.

Many Gove County residents are bitter because the closure meant their aging parents were transferred to facilities 50 miles away. And some are mad because they believe the hospital's decision to use outside staffing agencies to supplement local workers is what brought COVID-19 into the facility in the first place.

Nationally, more than 770 nursing homes have closed since 2020, displacing nearly 30,000 residents, according to a report in August by the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living.

Despite the frustration some Gove County residents express over the loss of the nursing home, 56% of voters this fall extended an existing sales tax supporting the hospital. Fiscarelli said he still sees strong turnout for hospital-organized events, which tells him Quinter's community fabric remains strong.

"Industries like health care and schools, that's what keep small communities going," Fiscarelli said. "We're here to support them and they're here to support us, and that's the best thing we can ask for in a small community."

Empty buildings on Main Street

Kerns, the Dairy Queen owner, is among those frustrated by how the hospital managed the nursing home closure. But she also acknowledges just how hard it is to find workers. Her restaurant often has to close when no one is available to work, she said, and she hopes to sell it soon and retire.

She's frustrated no one from Quinter wanted to buy the restaurant, and she marks that reticence down to the same loss of community that she believes spread with COVID-19. Unlike in years past, there are multiple homes for sale in the small gridded downtown, along with many empty commercial buildings along Main Street.

She worries about the future of her hometown after the pandemic, about the relationships that were forever altered, and the lingering economic struggles.

"Nobody wants to put in the effort it takes," she said. "COVID really changed us. It really did."

OPINION

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What I learned in my year as Miss America

Madison Marsh
Opinion contributor

Miss Colorado Madison Marsh, the first active-duty member of the military to win Miss America, is crowned Jan. 14. PROVIDED BY MISS AMERICA ORGANIZATION

When I became the first active-duty member of the military to win Miss America, I thought it was just a flashy headline. I didn't view it as groundbreaking. I was not the first woman to join the military or graduate from the Air Force Academy.

I entered the pageant, first for Miss Colorado, while attending the academy, so part of my motivation was to practice my public speaking in a real-world environment, and another part of my motivation was to give myself temporary breaks from my rigid military lifestyle. Then ... I won.

From my point of view, I did not rewrite history or alter the course of military culture, as many news sources reported. But in reflecting on my year as it comes to an end, I think I did something simpler, yet maybe more meaningful: I provided hope for those who have lofty goals but feel limited by their perception of what "type" of person they are. I showed people that the only limitation to your goals is the amount of work you put in.

When I think back on the year, which ends Sunday when a new Miss America is crowned, one moment sticks with me: I was back at the Air Force Academy, visiting for Parents' Weekend to support my sister-in-law, who is now a cadet. As I walked through the library, a freshman approached me. She asked if I was Miss America, and I said yes.

Personal identity vs. success

The cadet shared that, earlier this year, she had been on the fence about accepting her appointment to the academy. She was not sure if she could bring her whole self into the military, unsure if she would have to sacrifice parts of her identity to succeed. Then she saw me win Miss America. That moment convinced her she could do it too – that she could serve without losing herself.

For her, seeing someone thrive in the military and in the world of pageants showed her that she would not have to give up her personal identity. She could be herself and still find success by focusing on hard work over mere assimilation into the military culture.

As much as this year has been filled with inspiring moments, it has also brought back difficult memories. My mom's battle with pancreatic cancer – one she lost in 2018 after months of treatment – taught me how fragile and fleeting life can be. Watching her fight for her life changed my perspective in ways I did not fully grasp until now.

When I think back on the year, which ends Sunday when a new Miss America is crowned, one moment sticks with me: I was back at the Air Force Academy. (A) cadet shared that, earlier this year, she had been on the fence about accepting her appointment to the academy. ... Then she saw me win Miss America.

Madison Marsh and her mother, Whitney Marsh, at Fort Smith, Ark., in 2018, the year her mother died of pancreatic cancer. MARSH FAMILY

It's easy to get caught up in chasing the next accomplishment, climbing the ladder or worrying about what others think. But when I think about my mom and the lessons she taught me, I'm reminded that life is too short to waste on things that do not fulfill us.

We spend so much energy on the "rat race" that we sometimes miss what's truly important – the people and moments right in front of us.

This year, I have realized that one of the most liberating things one can do is to stop doing things for the sake of other people's opinions. Quit what does not fulfill you. Let go of what does not matter. I did not compete for Miss America to prove anything to anyone. I did it because I loved the process. I loved the challenge. I loved how it pushed me to grow in unexpected ways.

There is freedom in choosing what you want to pursue and giving yourself permission to quit what you don't.

When my mom was sick, she was not thinking about the accolades she hadn't achieved or wishing she had clocked in one extra hour at work. She was praying for more time with her loved ones and the chance to make more memories with them.

That clarity of purpose is what I strive to hold on to, even when life feels overwhelming.

True meaning of being 'the first'

I have come to realize that the true significance of being "the first" is not found in breaking records or collecting accolades. It is about creating hope for others, often in ways we might not even see ourselves. You do not need to hold a prestigious title to make an impact. Every one of us has the power to open doors and shift perspectives.

This year has also reminded me that real success is not defined by headlines or applause – it is about living a life that reflects your values and about staying true to what matters.

To anyone reading this: Stop chasing approval, accolades or external validation. Instead, focus on what fulfills you. Whether that means showing up to work, pursuing your passions or simply being present for the people you love, these are the moments that truly matter and will bring real success.

I love the quote attributed to Nelson Henderson: "The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit." I thought about Henderson's words many times throughout the year.

When I think about my mom's strength and the freshman cadet's courage, or about the countless people who have shared their stories with me this year, I'm reminded that life is too short to waste on shallow goals.

Dedicate yourself to working hard on the things you enjoy alongside the people you love, and success and happiness will follow.

U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Madison Marsh was crowned Miss America in 2024. She is pursuing her master's degree in public policy at Harvard University.

AI can save your life, but your doctor may be using it wrong

Dr. John Whyte
Opinion contributor

Doctors are starting to integrate artificial intelligence tools into their practices. Already, nearly 4 in 10 physicians use AI, according to a recent survey from the American Medical Association. But for the most part, doctors are using AI all wrong.

Doctors typically employ these new technologies as "virtual secretaries," using them to prepare clinic notes, respond to emails or write responses to denial letters from insurers.

Nearly half of physicians surveyed had the greatest enthusiasm about using AI for simple documentation work and insurance authorization.

AI is great at administrative work. But if that's all it's used for, we're wasting its potential.

Much of medicine is pattern recognition – in labs, imaging and symptoms. That is what supercomputers and machine learning excel at.

The most promising tools involve software and algorithms that can sort through staggering amounts of data to detect subtle patterns that doctors either can't detect on their own or can't detect nearly as quickly.

Consider this: There are nearly 800,000 preventable medical errors every year. About 40% of these are from misdiagnoses of common conditions such as pneumonia, strokes and lung cancer.

If AI can help reduce these errors, why wouldn't we embrace it? It would save countless lives and make physicians' jobs easier and more efficient.

Unfortunately, widespread adoption of AI is hindered by regulatory roadblocks and doctors' own pride.

Part of the problem is with the Food and Drug Administration, which admits that its standard regulatory process "was not designed" for integrating AI fully into medicine. Though it has proposed frameworks that factor in how AI continually improves itself, it hasn't solidified any approach.

AI improvement depends on how quickly doctors engage with it

Too often, regulators set a standard of near-perfection when evaluating AI tools, which can stifle innovation and make research overly complex.

Human doctors aren't expected to be perfect. We shouldn't expect perfection from AI.

To address AI-related issues, the Biden administration has expressed interest in appointing a "chief artificial intelligence officer." But what we actually need is more investment in research and a practical, consistent regulatory framework.

Too many doctors also have a negativity bias and remain hyper-focused on AI's capacity for error. I'm constantly reading the newest studies and articles in medical journals, and that concern is omnipresent.

Artificial intelligence can help doctors in under-resourced communities design personalized treatment plans for their patients. GETTY IMAGES

Those concerns are certainly valid, as are many others regarding the ethical use of AI. But I would urge physicians to have a more positive outlook and consider that on balance, these tools can improve the status quo of diagnosis and treatment – which is, of course, now far from perfect.

AI will only get better, but the speed with which it improves depends on how quickly doctors seriously engage with it.

Let's also address the elephant in the room: Some doctors are concerned about artificial intelligence because they secretly worry that it will replace or minimize their responsibilities.

Once again, I suggest they welcome the positive changes that AI can bring to clinical care.

Imagine how AI can help doctors in under-resourced communities design personalized treatment plans for their patients – without having to carve out several hours or wait days or weeks to consult with multiple specialists.

Look how technology serves both travel agents and consumers

I'm excited about the prospect of using AI to enable virtually everybody to receive a second opinion on cancer diagnoses. To those who worry about job stability – and the long-term relevance of physicians – look at the travel agent industry.

After websites like Expedia entered the picture, many people thought that travel agents' days were numbered.

Instead, the business model changed. Technology freed agents from dealing with straightforward booking requests, allowing them to specialize in more complex trips that demand a human touch, like honeymoons, luxury vacations and adventure travel. In 2023, the travel agent sector grew by 7.7%.

AI has extraordinary potential to transform the practice of medicine and help patients lead longer and healthier lives. But to make that a reality, doctors and regulators will have to view it in a new light.

Dr. John Whyte is chief medical officer of WebMD.

USA TODAY

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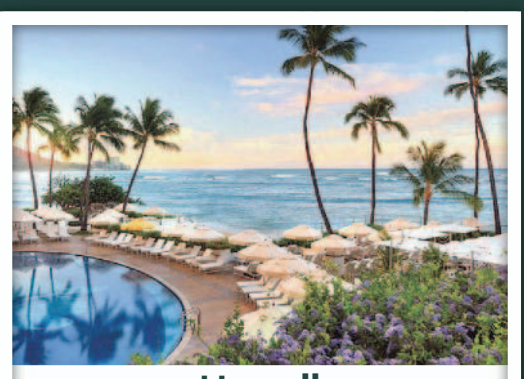
Mexico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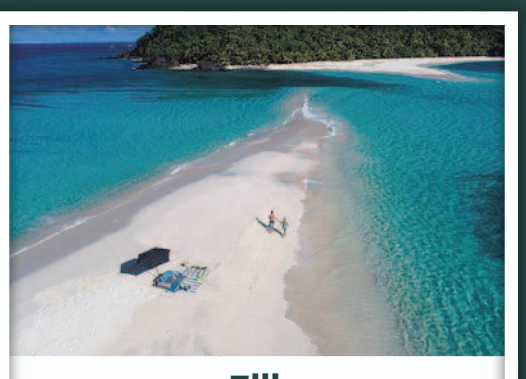
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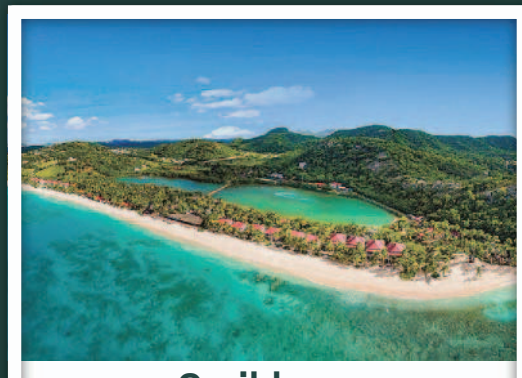
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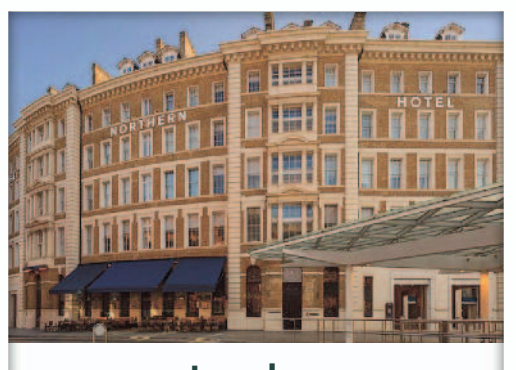
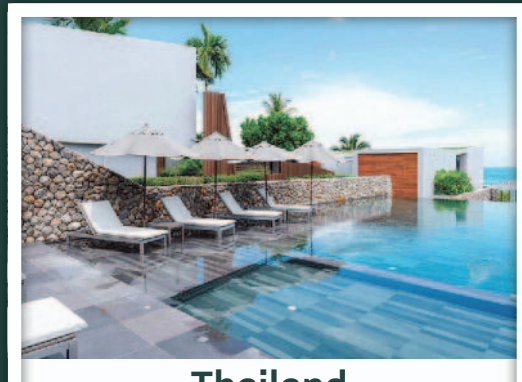
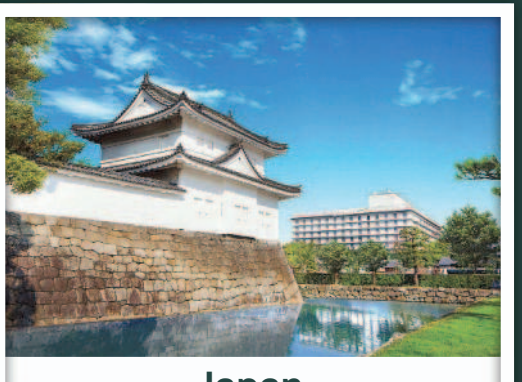


London

Bali


Thailand

New York


Japan

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Norovirus outbreaks may be rising on the high seas

A wave of cases of the "very contagious" illness has affected recent cruises. **Page 5B**

LIFELINE

JON KOPALOFF/GETTY IMAGES

HOW WAS YOUR DAY?
MRBEAST DOES A THING

MrBeast has found his better half. The popular YouTuber revealed in an interview with People that he asked fellow content creator Thea Booysen to marry him on Christmas Day. "Ya boy did a thing," he captioned an Instagram post, which showed him down on one knee holding the ring while he and Booysen wore matching holiday sweaters. Booysen also posted a video where she showed off the ring while sitting on her fiance's knee. Booysen began dating MrBeast, whose real name is Jimmy Donaldson, in 2022 after they met through a mutual friend on a trip he took to her home country of South Africa.

IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY
WHO'S CELEBRATING TODAY

Florence Pugh is 29. **Dan Harmon** is 52. **Jisoo** is 30.

HOROSCOPE | SANCTUARY
More: www.sanctuaryworld.co

Aries (March 21-April 19). Facing intense resistance? Allies become adversaries. The odds are stacked against you!

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Have you fully considered what you're fighting for? Mars' clash with Pluto fosters contests with those in power.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Pressured to obey? Someone in power tries to push their beliefs upon you.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Gripped by the green-eyed monster? The more you take, the more you risk losing.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Passionate desires? Be sure they are appropriately channeled as Mars and Pluto clash. Avoid coercive actions.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Sick of making slow progress? As Mars and Pluto clash, frustrations flare. You can't speed up this process!

Libra (Sept.23-Oct. 23). Caught in a vicious cycle? Mars' clash with Pluto intensifies addictive urges and behaviors. Don't succumb to temptation!

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Forced to table a professional initiative? Family conflict requires your attention. Avoid resentful retaliations.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Recognizing the futility of a fight? As Mars and Pluto clash, flaws in your argument prompt a crisis of conscience!

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). What are you afraid of? Anxieties around wealth and power trigger ill-thought-out decisions.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). With great power comes great responsibility. Remember this adage as Mars and Pluto clash! Use your authority wisely.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). Willing to choose a different strategy? If not, you'll be forced to do so as Mars and Pluto clash!

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Bryan Johnson doesn't want to die. Ever. PROVIDED BY NETFLIX

Spending millions to try to live forever

David Oliver USA TODAY

We're born, we live, we die. But what if we … *didn't* die? • A ridiculous question, to be sure. But also one that Bryan Johnson, 47, is trying to answer anyway in the new Netflix documentary, "Don't Die: The Man Who Wants to Live Forever" (now streaming). • "We have a history of asking really crazy questions, and sometimes they turn out to be true and sometimes not," he tells USA TODAY in late December. "But I think just in the past two or three years, is the first time in human history that one could pose this question."

You probably recognize what Johnson has been up to from a series of headlines; the Bloomberg article "How to Be 18 Years Old Again for Only $2 Million a Year" raised many eyebrows and spawned a social media uproar. It also caught the eye of filmmakers, including director Chris Smith. "It was something that I just wrote down, and was like, 'Oh, I should reach out to this guy,' " he says, and he ultimately landed the directing gig for the project.

The film tracks the former tech CEO's journey toward peak physical health – which includes spending $2 million on a home laboratory, staff and all the supplements, therapies and medical interventions you can imagine.

And he's trying to prove how far he can go. The morning of this interview, he scored a new personal best in his HIIT protocol he does three times a week. His max heart rate hit 189 bpm (on par with that of a 31-year-old, Johnson claims. The maximum heart rate for a 30-year-old is 190 bpm, according to the American Heart Association). His muscle oxygen saturation is in the 75th percentile for elite athletes, he says, and the 99th percentile for the general population.

"Most people in their late 40s are not achieving personal bests," he says. "It's considered to be a downward trend. So to be anywhere close to it, it's great, but to be seeing it is really exciting."

'He's the best guinea pig'

Johnson is racing to bring down his biological age and his pace of aging, considered crucial markers for longevity. After two years of "Blueprint" – the name of his health initiative – he says he has reversed his biological age 5.1 years. And during the course of the documentary, his pace of aging

See LONGEVITY, Page 2B

82ND GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS

Let the awards season begin

Marco della Cava USA TODAY

Time to break out the bucket of popcorn, entertainment lovers: It's a new year and the dawn of a new awards season, kicked off as usual by the Golden Globes. • The awards, previously dispensed by the scandal-plagued Hollywood Foreign Press Association, are now handed out by the Golden Globe Foundation after a 2023 takeover by Dick Clark Productions, and remain a popular Oscar bellwether. • This year, the 82nd annual Golden Globes will feature a hot comic as host, a new network, and plenty of stars hoping success Sunday means Academy Award fame in March.

How to watch the 2025 Golden Globe Awards

The 2025 Golden Globes will air live Sunday on CBS at 8 p.m. EST/5 PST. The show also will stream live on Paramount+ with Showtime for subscribers. (Paramount+ Essential subscribers can stream the ceremony the day after.)

For those eager to catch early action, the live red carpet pre-show begins at 6:30 p.m. EST/3:30 PST, hosted by Rachel Smith ("Entertainment Tonight") and Marc Malkin (Variety). The show will stream at Variety, "Entertainment Tonight," Women's Wear Daily, Billboard, Rolling Stone and other Penske Media platforms.

Comedian Nikki Glaser, who broke through on a roast of Tom Brady, will host the Golden Globes.
EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES

Who is hosting the 2025 Golden Globe Awards?

Fresh off her stellar, headline-making performance at Netflix's "The Roast of Tom Brady," comedian Nikki Glaser hopes her piercing brand of humor is better received than the bomb experienced last year by stand-up Jo Koy. She even has put off a cosmetic procedure until after the big night, joking she postponed a brow lift to host.

"The Golden Globes is not only a huge night for TV and film, but also for comedy," she said in a statement released by the Globes. "It's one of the few times that show business not only allows but encourages itself to be lovingly mocked (at least I hope so). (God, I hope so)."

Who is nominated for 2025 Golden Globe Awards?

Off-beat cartel-focused musical "Emilia Pérez" leads the pack at this year's Globes with 10 nominations, including best comedy or musical, actress in a comedy or musical for Karla Sofia Gascón, and supporting actress in a comedy or musical for both Zoe Saldana and Selena Gomez. Just behind "Pérez" are the post-World War II drama "The Brutalist" and the papal thriller

See GOLDEN GLOBES, Page 2B

USA TODAY BEST-SELLING BOOKS BOOKLIST.USATODAY.COM

Rank this week ☐ Rank last week

		TITLE/AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	GENRE	C
1	1	**Dog Man: Big Jim Begins: A Graphic Novel (Dog Man #13): From the Creator of Captain Underpants**/Pilkey, Dav	Graphix	Humorous Stories	F
2	2	**James** / Everett, Percival	Doubleday Books	Literary	F
3	60	**Escaping Peril: A Graphic Novel (Wings of Fire Graphic Novel #8)**/Sutherland, Tui T.	Graphix	Fantasy & Magic	F
4	n/a	**The Let Them Theory: A Life-Changing Tool That Millions of People Can't Stop Talking About**/Robbins, Mel	Hay House LLC	Personal Success	NF
5	3	**Hot Mess (Diary of a Wimpy Kid Book 19): Volume 19**/Kinney, Jeff	Amulet Books	Humorous Stories	F
6	17	**Quicksilver**/Hart, Callie	Forever	Fantasy - Romantic	F
7	27	**Fourth Wing**/Yarros, Rebecca	Entangled: Red Tower Books	Fantasy - Action & Adventure	F
8	5	**The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World**/Kimmerer, Robin Wall	Scribner Book Company	Essays	NF
9	4	**The Backyard Bird Chronicles/**Tan, Amy	Knopf Publishing Group	Personal Memoirs	NF
10	n/a	**Heavenly Tyrant**/Zhao, Xiran Jay	Tundra Books (NY)	Girls & Women	F
11	31	**Lights Out: An Into Darkness Novel**/Allen, Navessa	Zando - Slowburn	Romance - New Adult	F
12	9	**The Far Side(r) 2025 Off-The-Wall Day-To-Day Calendar**/Larson, Gary	Andrews McMeel Publishing	Humorous	NF
13	6	**Small Things Like These**/Keegan, Claire	Grove Press	Literary	F
14	12	**The Women**/Hannah, Kristin	St. Martin's Press	Women	F
15	18	**Intermezzo**/Rooney, Sally	Farrar, Straus and Giroux	Literary	F
16	10	**Counting Miracles**/Sparks, Nicholas	Random House	Women	F
17	36	**The God of the Woods**/Moore, Liz	Riverhead Books	Literary	F
18	8	**Murdle: Volume 1: 100 Elementary to Impossible Mysteries to Solve Using Logic, Skill, and the Power of Deduction**/Karber, G. T.	St. Martin's Griffin	Logic & Brain Teasers	NF
19	22	**Orbital: A Novel (Booker Prize Winner)**/Samantha Harvey	Grove Press	Literary	F
20	15	**Wind and Truth: Book Five of the Stormlight Archive**/Sanderson, Brandon	Tor Books	Fantasy - Epic	F
21	45	**Haunting Adeline**/Carlton, H D	Zando	Romance - Contemporary	F
22	30	**The Housemaid**/McFadden, Freida	Grand Central Publishing	Psychological	F
23	34	**A Court of Thorns and Roses**/Maas, Sarah J.	Bloomsbury Publishing	Fantasy - Epic	F
24	24	**All Fours**/July, Miranda	Riverhead Books	Humorous - General	F
25	14	**Be Ready When the Luck Happens: A Memoir**/Garten, Ina	Crown Publishing Group (NY)	Personal Memoirs	NF
26	47	**Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones**/Clear, James	Avery Publishing Group	Organizational Behavior	NF
27	7	**Melania**/Trump, Melania	Skyhorse Publishing	Personal Memoirs	NF
28	44	**Iron Flame**/Yarros, Rebecca	Entangled: Red Tower Books	Fantasy - Epic	F
29	n/a	**Blood Over Bright Haven**/Wang, M. L.	Del Rey Books	Fantasy - Dark Fantasy	F
30	28	**Framed: Astonishing True Stories of Wrongful Convictions/**McCloskey, Jim	Doubleday Books	Murder - General	NF
31	40	**The Frozen River: A GMA Book Club Pick/** Lawhon, Ariel	Vintage	Women	F
32	64	**On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons From the Twentieth Century**/Snyder, Timothy	Crown Publishing Group (NY)	Essays	NF
33	32	**Cher: The Memoir, Part One**/Cher	Dey Street Books	Entertainment & Performing Arts	NF
34	73	**Demon Copperhead: A Pulitzer Prize Winner/** Kingsolver, Barbara	Harper Perennial	Literary	F
35	62	**The Wedding People**/Espach, Alison	Henry Holt & Company	Humorous - General	F
36	49	**The Nightingale**/Hannah, Kristin	St. Martin's Griffin	Literary	F
37	39	**Revenge of the Tipping Point: Overstories, Superspreaders, and the Rise of Social Engineering**/Gladwell, Malcolm	Little Brown and Company	Social Psychology	NF
38	148	**Phantasma**/Smith, Kaylie	Forever	Fantasy - Romantic	F
39	66	**Dog Man: The Scarlet Shedder: A Graphic Novel (Dog Man #12): From the Creator of Captain Underpants/** Pilkey, Dav	Graphix	Humorous Stories	F
40	50	**We Who Wrestle with God: Perceptions of the Divine**/Peterson, Jordan B.	Portfolio	Personal Growth - Happiness	NF
41	130	**The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness/** Haidt, Jonathan	Penguin Press	Mental Health	NF
42	n/a	**If I Must Die: Poetry and Prose**/Alareer, Refaat	OR Books	Middle East - Israel & Palestine	NF
43	n/a	**The Wren in the Holly Library (Deluxe Limited Edition)**/Linde, K. A.	Entangled: Red Tower Books	Fantasy - Romantic	F
44	19	**From Crook to Cook: Platinum Recipes from Tha Boss Dogg's Kitchen**/Dogg, Snoop	Chronicle Books	Media Tie-In	NF
45	121	**Hunting Adeline**/Carlton, H D	Zando	Romance - Contemporary	F
46	n/a	**Verity**/Hoover, Colleen	Grand Central Publishing	Romance - Contemporary	F
47	51	**The Book of Bill**/Hirsch, Alex	Hyperion Avenue	Humorous - General	F
48	42	**The House of Cross: Meet the Hero of the New Prime Series Cross – The Greatest Detective of All Time/** Patterson, James	Little Brown and Company	Thrillers - Suspense	F
49	131	**Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks From the Stone Age to AI**/Harari, Yuval Noah	Random House	Anthropology - Cultural & Social	NF
50	25	**Dandadan, Vol. 1**/Tatsu, Yukinobu	Viz Media	Manga - Supernatural	NF

WHAT AMERICA'S READING® The book list appears every Thursday. You also can find it at booklist.usatoday.com. Each week, USA TODAY collects sales data from booksellers representing a variety of outlets: bookstore chains, independent bookstores, mass merchandisers and online retailers. Using that data, we determine the 150 top-selling titles of the week.

Longevity

Continued from Page 1B

dropped from 0.69 to 0.64, meaning that for every year that goes by, he'll age only by about two-thirds of that year.

All of Johnson's protocols – including diet, supplements, exercises, therapies – are available on the Blueprint website. In theory, anyone could follow all or some of his habits and purchase specialized supplements and tests on his site or elsewhere. But Johnson's routines aren't easy to replicate. He wakes up at 5 a.m. and is in bed by 8:30 p.m. He exercises for an hour to 90 minutes each morning. He takes dozens upon dozens of pills, wears a red light therapy hat on his head for hair growth, eats his last meal of the day at 11 a.m. and stops drinking fluids at 4 p.m. MRIs and other medical tests break up this cycle; he claims to have spent more time in an MRI than anyone in the world.

It seems like a lot, but "what once seemed maybe shocking became normalized" after spending more time together and testing each idea, Smith says.

His longevity consultant, Dr. Oliver Zolman, helped him come up with the plan. "He's the best guinea pig anyone can ask for," Zolman says in the documentary.

Other medical experts interviewed questioned his throw-everything-at-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks approach to longevity. Why not focus on one intervention at a time? Or spend money on clinical trials devoted to these interventions instead of pouring resources into one man? They also are skeptical of him pursuing gene therapy, something typically used only for serious conditions. Still, six months later, the film claims his muscle mass grew by 7%. Declining muscle mass is a natural part of aging.

Johnson supports anyone trying to become healthier, including other longevity programs. But is he also ready to "Make America Healthy Again" with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., if he is confirmed as Health and Human Services secretary? The pair snapped a photo and shared it on X last November. "I think we (at Blueprint have) done a better job than anyone the entire world, mastering the basics of scientific evidence for health and for establishing a clean food supply chain," Johnson says. "And so we're hoping to bridge these things to the new administration and help them out in what we've done."

'100 years is not going to be enough'

Johnson's past offers clues into why he jumped on the longevity train. He grew up Mormon and had a modest upbringing; his parents divorced and his father struggled with substance abuse. He created the payments company Braintree, which later purchased Venmo; he sold the company to eBay in 2013 for $800 million. A father of three, he too got divorced and ultimately left the Mormon church and found purpose in Blueprint and his longevity quest after a history of unhealthy eating and suicidal thoughts.

He also reconnected with eldest son Talmage, who spent the last year of high school with his father. People might recognize Talmage as Johnson's "blood boy"; he donated plasma to his father, and Johnson to *his* father, all part of this longevity pursuit.

Bryan Johnson, center, with his father, left, and son, Talmage. PROVIDED BY NETFLIX

During the documentary, Johnson's moments with his son humanize him. He breaks down in front of Talmage in a Target, showing a rare moment of emotion as he grapples with his son going off to college. He wants multiple lifetimes with Talmage, he says – "100 years is not going to be enough" – a sentiment any parent could relate to.

'It's very hard to predict your future self'

The best part about longevity medicine is that every little effort you make to tweak your routines could increase your lifespan. Sleep, diet and exercise are what doctors all over the world recommend.

"Those are the things that I'm working on," Smith says. Though he chronicled Johnson's journey, "I haven't engaged or adopted any of Bryan's protocols or interventions, but I am trying to sleep better. I'm trying to eat better. I'm trying to exercise when possible."

But let's say Johnson can't maintain his regimen. "It's very hard to predict your future self," Johnson concedes. "So I'm very humble in that none of us ever know what our future selves will imagine. It's reasonable to me to imagine that at any age, I will value feeling good. I will value being able to play sports. I will value waking up and feeling great. I will value waking up feeling rested. I will probably not like being sick."

What Johnson is doing is trying to push the boundaries of what optimal health is. You may not agree with his methods – medical experts are certainly wary of the scientific basis for his protocols and of him selling products as part of his endeavor – but as the saying goes, life is short. Or only as short as we let it be.

Golden Globes

Continued from Page 1B

"Conclave," with seven and six nominations respectively.

"The Bear" is back on the TV front after picking up three statues in 2023. The restaurant drama got five nominations, nudging out "Only Murders in the Building" and "Shogun" with four.

Additionally, Ted Danson and Viola Davis are receiving special awards: He'll receive the Carol Burnett Award, bestowed upon those who've made outstanding contributions to television, and she'll receive the Cecil B. DeMille Award for outstanding contributions to the entertainment world.

Do the 2025 Golden Globe Awards translate to Oscar gold?

Actors, directors and producers picking up Golden Globe awards have good reason to feel their wins could be a harbinger of Oscar night celebrations in a few months. That said, they should be cautiously optimistic at best, as the Globes have been notoriously finicky when predicting Academy Awards victories.

Last year did bode well for Globe winners on Oscar night. Cillian Murphy took home both awards for his portrayal of scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer in "Oppenheimer," that year's Oscar best picture winner. Emma Stone also claimed that prestigious double for her star turn in "Poor Things."

But one year before, an emotional Austin Butler took home a Golden Globe for playing the King of Rock 'n' Roll in Baz Luhrmann's sprawling biopic "Elvis," but was bested on Oscar night by Brendan Fraser in "The Whale."

Contributing: Kim Willis

Selena Gomez is nominated for supporting actress for her role in the Spanish-language movie musical "Emilia Pérez." PROVIDED BY SHANNA BESSON/PAGE 114/WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS/PATHÉ FILMS/FRANCE 2 CINÉMA

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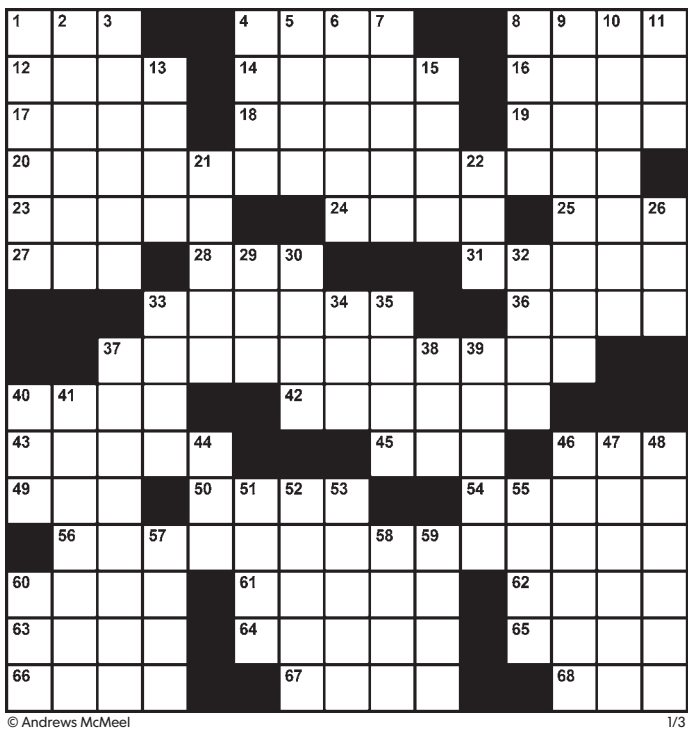
EDITED Amanda rafkin
BY Claire Rimkus

IN THE MOOD



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ACROSS
1 "SNL" alum Meadows
4 Pirouetted
8 Pilot whale relative
12 Awards quartet for Jennifer Hudson
14 Human-made waterway
16 What a hat covers
17 Car
18 Still kicking
19 Rustic road trip stops
20 "The Testaments" author
23 Pro-worker organization
24 "So, what ___ is new?"
25 Move like a dog's tail
27 Vessel for sauteing
28 Midday snooze
31 Bust a move
33 Refuses to admit
36 Shoe part that can be "high"
37 Cuisine with quesadillas and pambazos
40 Available for business
42 Rainy and blustery
43 Silk ___ (hair straightening technique)
45 Nintendo console with Sports and Sports Resort games
46 Jabber
49 Vietnamese Lunar New Year
50 Product of a lightbulb moment
54 Engine booster
56 Iconic NYC drag queen
60 Division in a bowling alley
61 Took without asking
62 Berry in some smoothies
63 Boundary
64 Concise
65 "You are ___" (map phrase)
66 Work-from-home need
67 Not counterfeit
68 Some lines on maps (Abbr.)

DOWN
1 Join forces
2 Lizard with a "rhinoceros" species
3 Brand for cramp relief
4 Disney character who sings "Be Prepared"
5 Faint, like a color
6 Come together
7 Ship-related
8 Halle Berry's home state
9 Acclaimed
10 Basketball great Parker
11 Streaming interruptions
13 Like a restaurant order that will be enjoyed elsewhere
15 "___ not and say we did!"
21 Building add-on
22 Got married
26 Durable kind of nail polish
29 "My IQ" singer DiFranco
30 Many posts on Insta
32 Sailor's call
33 Lions' lairs
34 Enjoy a meal
35 Winter weather in many holiday movies
37 Gatherings with agendas
38 Day after Thurs.
39 Leaves out
40 Make a selection
41 Prepared in advance
44 Gendered familial nickname
46 Food seller
47 On a train
48 Celestial ___ (planets, stars, etc.)
51 Debris that can form into "bunnies"
52 Go inside
53 Love to bits
55 Salt Lake City's state
57 Look for
58 "Frozen" queen
59 Fishing spool
60 Went first

Thursday's Answer

C	U	B	A	■	A	W	E	S	■	P	U	F	F	S
O	S	L	O	■	P	O	S	E	■	I	T	A	L	Y
B	E	E	R	■	O	O	P	S	■	A	T	L	A	S
B	R	U	T	A	L	L	Y	H	O	N	E	S	T	■
■	■	■	A	B	L	E	■	■	P	O	R	E	■	■
T	A	P	■	B	O	N	S	A	I	■	■	A	R	F
A	D	O	R	E	■	■	■	I	A	N	■	F	L	O	E
B	E	L	L	Y	O	F	T	H	E	B	E	A	S	T
O	L	A	Y	■	O	B	I	■	■	L	Y	R	I	C
O	E	R	■	C	H	I	N	E	S	E	■	M	E	H
■	■	■	B	I	L	E	■	■	■	X	M	E	N	■
■	■	B	E	S	I	D	E	T	H	E	P	O	I	N	T
T	E	A	S	E	■	M	E	A	L	■	T	S	A	R
R	E	R	U	N	■	M	A	L	L	■	E	L	M	O
I	N	S	E	T	■	A	R	E	S	■	D	E	E	D

1/2

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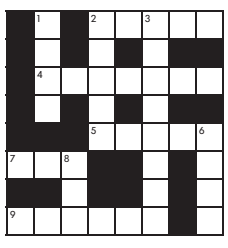
TXTPERT



1/3

Across
2. 45263
4. 7962773
5. 74687
7. 863
9. 267839

Down
1. 3478
2. 43637
3. 27736349
6. 7546
8. 327

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Today's theme
Human body

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues. For example: 2 could be A, B or C ... and 5678 could be LOST

Yesterday's solution 1/2

Numbers

More puzzles: **puzzles.usatoday.com**
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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

1			9			4		
9		6		1			3	
			6	5		9		
		9		4			7	
			5		3			
	8			9		6		
		7		2	4			
	9			6		8		7
		4			9			5

1/3

DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★

SUDOKU FUSION ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

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Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

		5	6	3	
		4			
			4		1
4		1			
			5		
	5	6	1		

DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★

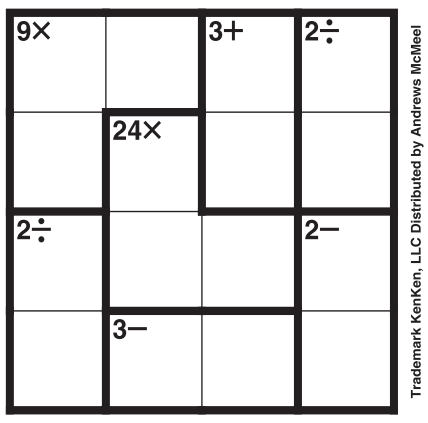
Thursday's Answers

4	7	3	5	6	1	2	8	9
1	2	6	7	9	8	3	5	4
9	8	5	2	3	4	7	6	1
8	4	1	6	2	7	9	3	5
2	3	9	8	1	5	6	4	7
6	5	7	3	4	9	1	2	8
5	9	2	4	7	6	8	1	3
3	1	4	9	8	2	5	7	6
7	6	8	1	5	3	4	9	2

4	2	1	5	3	6
5	6	3	1	4	2
6	5	4	2	1	3
3	1	2	4	6	5
2	4	6	3	5	1
1	3	5	6	2	4

1/2

KENKEN



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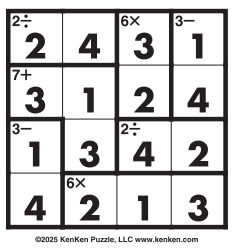
1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 (easy) or 1 though 6 (challenging) without repeating.

2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.

3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



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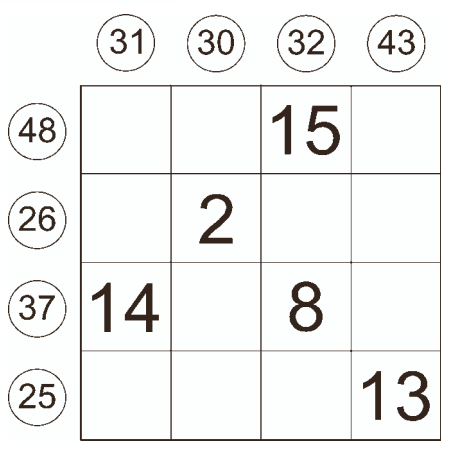
KUBOK 16

By Davide Coppo Difficulty: **HARD**



Solution to Thursday's puzzle

2	14	9	11
8	15	4	10
6	1	3	7
12	5	13	16

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so that the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.

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1/3/25

Words

WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 1/3

Find and Circle:
Seven shapes ☑□□□□□□
Four five-letter country capitals □□□□
Two black-and-white mammals □□
Golden ____ Bridge □
Seven-letter body of water □

Thursday's answer: GALLON QUART LITER PINT / BRUNCH CRUNCH LUNCH BUNCH / MONTH WEEK HOUR YEAR / POULTRY BEEF PORK / LOIS

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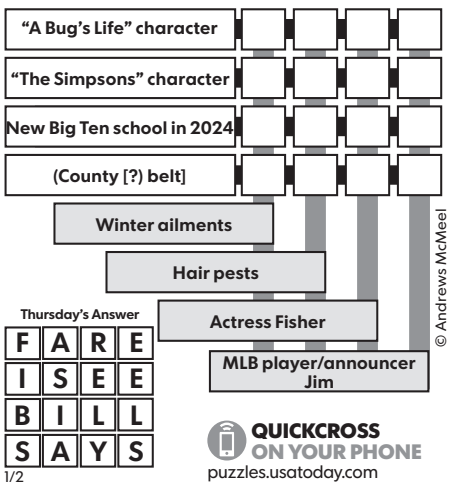
QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes 1/3



Thursday's Answer

F	A	R	E
I	S	E	E
B	I	L	L
S	A	Y	S

1/2

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QUICKCROSS ON YOUR PHONE
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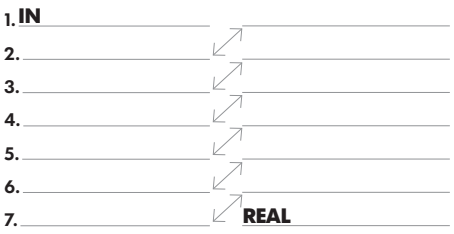
UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 1/3



Clues:
1. Where to find Orlando
2. College in Tallahassee
3. Hawaii's nene, e.g.
4. 2018 Sandra Bullock movie
5. Package, in a way
6. ____ ____ anything
7. "Seriously"

Thursday's Answer

HAPPY	BIRTHDAY
BIRTHDAY	GIFT
GIFT	BOX
BOX	OFFICE
OFFICE	BUILDING
BUILDING	SITE
SITE	PLAN

PLAY ONLINE PUZZLES.USATODAY.COM

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DON'T QUOTE ME®

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English musician David Bowie talks about the artistic process.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
ARTIST EXPECTATIONS OTHER TERRIBLY THINK

"I _____ IT'S _____ DANGEROUS FOR AN _____ TO FULFILL _____ PEOPLE'S _____."

1/3

Thursday's Answer: "You know what charm is: a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question." - Albert Camus

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES **SOLUTIONS**
1 cover a window from outside (7) _____
2 exchanged (8) _____
3 considerate behavior (6) _____
4 supported by regular ridges (6) _____
5 William and Harry (5) _____
6 wooly terrier breed (10) _____
7 embellish (7) _____

SH	DUK	HED	TER	MI
ITC	LI	IFY	ES	FA
BED	TON	RIB	CO	SW
TY	NC	UT	NG	BED

Thursday's Answers: 1. VITAMINS 2. NAILS 3. GRANTS 4. CRATER 5. FLORENCE 6. PUPIL 7. RHETT 1/3

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JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NEYNP

ZDADE

TARROO

MOCIEN

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: DEPTH BYLAW USEFUL FREELY
Answer: When it comes to giving lawns morning moisture, Mother Nature tries to — "DEW" HER BEST

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BONUS CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Keeps out
5 Rebuke
10 — of paradise
14 "— — Rhythm"
15 Los Angeles player
16 Under covers
17 Broad bean
18 School assignment
19 Queue
20 Spate
22 Writer Ralph — Emerson
24 Possess
25 Fad
26 "... — angels fear to tread"
28 Promoting good health
32 Admonishes
33 Flooring piece
34 Regret
35 Cover
36 Operated
37 Under the weather
38 "Loneliest" number
39 Blockage
41 Bit to eat
44 Give an account of
46 Star sign
47 Ceremony
48 Actor — Idle
49 Illegal payment
51 Safety match alternative
55 Love personified
56 Plant secretion
59 Therefore
60 Drooping
61 Playing marble
62 Billboard
63 Command for a pooch
64 Runs
65 Playthings

DOWN
1 Hit
2 Culture medium
3 Wander
4 Squirreled away
5 Arm-length tats
6 Class
7 Gives approval
8 Grassland
9 Sheet rock
10 Classical form of dance
11 Footnote abbr.
12 Town in Nevada
13 Ike's initials
21 Rabbit
23 Fever
25 Come down in buckets
26 Complain
27 Pelts
28 Actors' place
29 Come to be
30 Holds sway
31 Cry
32 Earthy lump
36 Terry garment
39 Bed for baby
40 Word-for-word
41 Leathernecks
42 First (Abbr.)
43 Most opulent
45 Like corn chips
48 Exclusive group
49 Londoner
50 Italia's capital
52 Threesome
53 Like a breakfast plate
54 Director Howard and others
55 Urban railways
57 The "I"
58 Weaken

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

B	A	R	B	■	E	R	A	S	■	■	A	L	E	C
L	U	A	U	■	V	E	N	U	S	■	T	I	D	E
O	T	I	S	■	E	X	T	R	A	■	T	M	E	N
W	O	N	T	O	N	■	I	G	N	O	R	A	N	T
■	■	■	L	U	T	E	■	E	D	N	A	■	■	■
I	N	S	E	C	U	R	E	■	S	E	C	T	S	■
N	I	P	■	H	A	R	M	S	■	■	T	O	N	I
C	L	A	P	■	L	O	B	E	S	■	S	P	A	R
H	E	R	O	■	■	R	E	V	U	E	■	I	K	E
■	S	K	I	R	T	■	R	E	P	L	A	C	E	D
■	■	■	S	U	R	F	■	N	E	S	T	■	■	■
B	E	G	O	N	I	A	S	■	R	A	T	T	A	N
O	M	E	N	■	O	K	A	P	I	■	E	R	L	E
M	I	N	E	■	S	E	T	T	O	■	N	E	A	T
B	R	E	D	■	■	D	E	A	R	■	D	E	N	S

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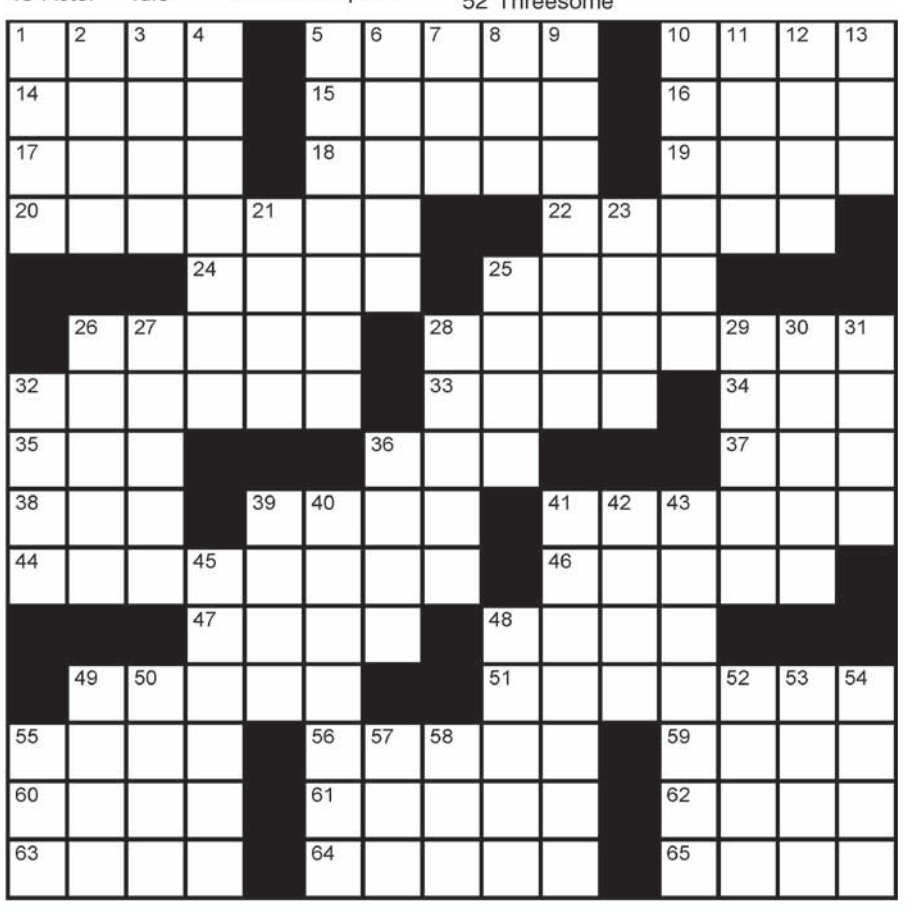

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Samantha Brown talks about her 25 years in travel game

She is marking 25 years as a travel TV host with the return of her Emmy-winning series. **Page 8B**

MONEYLINE

LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES

PASSWORD REVIEW SHOWS MOST ARE EASY TO CRACK

Bank accounts, social media profiles, streaming platforms and even smart refrigerators require passwords these days. Keeping track of a laundry list of passwords can be difficult and so can be creating new, unique ones. For the sixth year, NordPass, an online password manager, has released a list of the 200 most common passwords – ones that should be avoided due to how easy they are to "crack," or hack. To create its list, NordPass collaborated with partner NordSteller, a threat exposure management platform. The two platforms analyzed 2.5 terabytes of data from 44 countries. According to NordPass, the password "123456" has been the most common password five out of six years of its study.

AT&T TO ELIMINATE MOST LANDLINE SERVICE BY 2029

AT&T plans to eliminate its traditional landline phone service across nearly all U.S. states in its service area by 2029, according to an official announcement. The telecom company has said its copper wire infrastructure is antiquated, maintaining it is costly and better service is available through fiber and wireless broadband networks. However, consumer advocates nationwide have objected to the removal of traditional phone service. They say access to basic landlines is important for the country's most vulnerable people, including senior citizens, consumers who can't afford cell service and those in rural areas who may not have good access to cell or broadband internet.

LUIGI MANGIONE ITEMS ATTRACTING CRITICISM

From T-shirts and hoodies to coffee mugs and shot glasses, merchandise referring to the suspected gunman in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson is popping up on the internet. Online sellers, looking to cash in on the sympathies that some have expressed for suspect Luigi Mangione, have drawn criticism. Online marketplaces generally prohibit the sale of items that glorify violence, but that prohibition does not extend to all Mangione-related merchandise. "eBay policies do not prohibit the sale of items with the phrase 'Deny. Defend. Depose,' " the company said in a statement. "However, items that glorify or incite violence ... are prohibited." Amazon told USA TODAY it has pulled merchandise using the phrase for violating company guidelines.

PATRICK T. FALLON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

DRUG PRICES TO RISE THIS YEAR BY 4.5% ON AVERAGE

Drugmakers plan to raise U.S. prices on at least 250 branded medications including Pfizer COVID-19 treatment Paxlovid, Bristol Myers Squibb's cancer cell therapies and vaccines from France's Sanofi at the start of 2025, according to an analysis by 3 Axis Advisors. The median price increase of the drugs is 4.5%. The increases are to list prices, which do not include rebates to pharmacy benefit managers and other discounts.

Tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada could sting

Economists say inflation could significantly rise

Paul Davidson
USA TODAY

The tariffs President-elect Donald Trump has threatened to impose on imports from Mexico and Canada would significantly increase U.S. inflation next year and modestly curtail economic growth, economists and trade experts say.

Trump has vowed to hit all goods shipped to the U.S. from Mexico and Canada with a 25% tariff and all Chinese imports with a 10% levy on his first day in office, Jan. 20. Trump has said his aim is to pressure the countries to stop the flow into the U.S. of illegal drugs and immigrants who lack permanent legal status.

Several experts said the threat was probably a negotiating tactic intended to prod the countries to take action on drug trafficking and illegal immigration. Gary Hufbauer, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said the Trump administration probably would schedule the fees to take effect in March, which would give countries time to negotiate a deal that addresses the disputes.

Otherwise, he said, the levies likely would spark retaliatory tariffs from Mexico and Canada, possibly creating an intractable trade conflict.

See TARIFFS, Page 6B

Fruit could be impacted by Trump's proposed tariffs, particularly avocados, melons and citrus fruits. STEVE HEASLIP/USA TODAY NETWORK

A CDC report found that acute gastroenteritis incidence rates on cruises "decreased significantly" between 2006 and 2019 among voyages reviewed. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

Norovirus outbreaks appear on the rise on the high seas

Illness aboard Queen Mary 2 follows string of other cases in recent weeks, including on two other lines

Nathan Diller
USA TODAY

Beth Knowles and her family left on a Caribbean cruise in late December, but they missed every port. They got too sick to disembark during a norovirus outbreak on board.

Knowles got an email from Cunard Line one day before their Dec. 21 departure notifying her of cases of gastrointestinal illness during the previous voyage from Southampton, England, to New York. After boarding the Queen Mary 2 ship, she said she noticed "do not disturb" signs on doors and room service trays lining hallways and that some other passengers appeared sick.

"We got on the ship and we had two very nice days, and then one by one, each of us became ill," she told USA TODAY. Knowles, 55, who is based in New York, felt flu-like symptoms. Her son and other relatives also experienced vomiting and diarrhea.

"For myself, I felt like I had the worst flu ever, where I had a fever, I had those aches where your joints hurt and where you really just can't get out of bed," she said.

Knowles tried to visit the ship's medical center but was met by a sign that said it was "for appointment only," with

See NOROVIRUS, Page 6B

What is norovirus?

Norovirus causes an inflammation of the stomach or intestines called acute gastroenteritis, according to the CDC. The virus is "very contagious," and symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, fever, headache and others.

The illness can spread through direct person-to-person contact and contaminated food, drinks and surfaces, the health agency said. Symptoms typically show up between 12 and 48 hours after exposure, and most people feel better within one to three days – though those infected can still spread the virus for two weeks after recovering (or longer).

How to recognize fake PayPal scams

Look at sender's email, history before responding

Tech Talk
Kim Komando

"Reminder: You've still got a money request!" That was the subject line of the messages flooding my husband Barry's inbox for weeks. The first couple were concerning, then it was just downright annoying.

He's not the only one getting them; there's a sneaky scam going around that looks totally legit – because it actually comes from PayPal.

Let's take a closer look at how it works so you don't fall for it.

Here's how it goes down

Lucky for us, scammers use the same tricks. This one is getting common enough, it's easy to spot if you're careful.

First, you receive an invoice via PayPal. It might say something like, "Payment due for a purchase" or tell you a payment was processed due to a technical error.

It looks real because it was sent through PayPal's platform. They hope you'll panic and act without thinking. PayPal is a trusted platform, so when you see its logo and familiar format, it's easy to let your guard down.

It's a bogus invoice, of course

PayPal allows anyone with an account to send an invoice, which scammers exploit to make it seem legit.

In the invoice notice is a phone number you can call for support. It's listed as PayPal's number, but it's someone ready to steal your money and info. All the scam emails I've reviewed had different numbers attached.

Calling the fake support number is the worst thing you can do. The scammer might ask for your login details or

See KOMANDO, Page 6B

Tariffs

Continued from Page 5B

"At that point, it's very difficult to unwind the tariff wars," Hufbauer said.

But if Trump follows though on his pledge, it would substantially boost inflation next year after pandemic-induced consumer price increases had largely abated, economists said.

Economists already had anticipated at least a 10% tariff on Chinese imports next year and built that into their forecasts. During his presidential campaign, Trump said he would impose a 10% to 20% tariff on all imports and as much as a 60% duty on Chinese goods to incentivize companies to move production to the U.S. or buy American-made products.

What does America import from Mexico?

High tariffs on Mexico and Canada were not expected and would violate the North American trade pact that took effect in 2020. The U.S. imported $480 billion in goods from Mexico last year, including vehicles, electrical equipment, machinery, furniture, plastics and metal, according to Trading Economics.

How much does the US import from Canada?

The $429 billion in 2024 imports from Canada included vehicles, machinery, wood, metal and pharmaceutical products, Trading Economics figures show.

New fees on goods from Mexico, Canada and China would cost a typical American family an additional $1,300 a year, said Brendan Duke, senior director of economic policy a the left-leaning Center for American Progress.

Tariffs would especially hobble the U.S. auto industry, which imports raw materials from Mexico to make parts that are then shipped back to that country for vehicle assembly, Hufbauer said. Some parts cross the border several times as they're enhanced before vehicles are sold to American consumers, which could pile on several rounds of tariffs.

The duties could increase the price of cars and trucks sold in the U.S. by about 10%, Hufbauer said. And by damping auto sales or prompting manufacturers in other countries to switch to non-U.S. parts suppliers, the levies could mean layoffs for some of the 1 million U.S. auto manufacturing workers., Hufbauer said.

Though manufacturers or retailers could absorb some of the cost increases, Deutsche Bank figures most would be passed on to American consumers.

What is inflation target for 2025?

The research firm had expected a core measure of that inflation index, which excludes volatile food and energy items, to dip just slightly from 2.7% in September to 2.6% by the end of next year because of Trump's planned tariffs on Chinese goods. Duties on the North American trading partners probably would push inflation higher, to 3.7% next year, Deutsche Bank said in a research note.

Without any levies, inflation probably would tumble to 2.2% in 2025, said Deutsche Bank economist Justin Weidner.

Goldman Sachs predicts tariffs on Mexico and Canada would lead to a slightly smaller 0.9% rise in the core inflation measure in 2025.

But that measure had fallen sharply from a peak of 5.6% in early 2022.

"Inflation was set to come down" further, Weidner said. "This would undercut the progress."

He added that prices theoretically would increase just next year but wouldn't continue to rise due to tariffs after that, allowing inflation to return to the lower rate that would have prevailed absent the levies in 2026. But the level of prices would be permanently higher, Weidner said.

How much will US economy grow?

The new fees also would hurt economic growth. By reducing consumer spending and prompting Mexico and Canada to retaliate with tariffs on U.S. shipments to those countries – largely on agricultural products – the fees could lower the nation's economic growth by three-tenths of a percentage point in 2026 to just under 2%, Weidner said.

Among other effects, higher inflation could mean the Federal Reserve would lower interest rates fewer times next year, damping consumer and business borrowing and economic activity, Weidner said.

The Carnival Liberty Cruise ship docked at Port Everglades on Nov. 19, 2006 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. More than 700 passengers and crew were stricken with symptoms that match norovirus. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

Norovirus

Continued from Page 5B

a number to call in case of gastrointestinal illness. They self-quarantined, but after learning her family was sick, Knowles' room steward let them know he reported the cases. Knowles said they were added to the ship's quarantine list. The medical center later called Knowles, but she had not seen a doctor or received an official diagnosis as of this story's time of publishing. She said she intended to visit the center again.

Among 2,565 guests on board Knowles' voyage, 326 have reported being ill, along with 65 crew members, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The ship was due back in New York on Friday, per CruiseMapper, after a two-week sailing.

"We can confirm that a number of guests on board Queen Mary 2 have reported symptoms of gastrointestinal illness," Cunard told USA TODAY in an emailed statement. "In response, enhanced health protocols have been implemented, including additional deep cleaning of public areas and staterooms, and close monitoring by our medical team, to ensure the comfort, health, and wellbeing of all guests and crew." The company did not comment on specifics of Knowles' experience.

The illness aboard Queen Mary 2 follows a string of other norovirus outbreaks at sea in recent weeks, including on two Holland America Line ships and a Princess Cruises vessel. Here's what travelers should know.

Is norovirus seasonal?

"It typically does occur in the winter," Dr. Dean Winslow, a professor of medicine and pediatrics at Stanford Medicine, told USA TODAY. "And some of the reasons for that probably are the fact that we are indoors more, so there is more close contact."

The virus causes an average of between 19 and 21 million illnesses each year in the U.S., according to the CDC, as well as 109,000 hospitalizations and 900 deaths. Those fatalities primarily occur among people 65 and up. The illness may be less seasonal in places closer to the equator, the health agency said.

Winslow said cases are "definitely more prevalent" than during the COVID-19 pandemic with its heightened health and safety protocols. "I think what you're now seeing is kind of just a resurgence of what's more of a normal pattern, and the fact that people are actually going out in public, and they're going on cruises as well as traveling to other destinations," he said.

There has been a surge in recent months. Between Aug. 1 and Dec. 11, about 495 outbreaks were reported by the 14 states that participate in the NoroSTAT network, up from 363 in the previous year. "The total number of outbreaks reported during the 2024–2025 seasonal year is above the range reported during the same period during the 2012–2020 and 2021-2024 seasonal years," the health agency said on its website.

Are cruise ship norovirus outbreaks up?

The CDC has logged 16 outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness on cruises that met its threshold for public notification this year. In 13 of those, norovirus was listed as the causative agent. The others were caused by E. coli, salmonella, or listed as unknown. The previous year, norovirus caused 13 of 14 outbreaks.

However, a CDC report found that acute gastroenteritis incidence rates on cruises "decreased significantly" between 2006 and 2019 among voyages reviewed. That figure dropped from 32.5 cases per 100,000 travel days among passengers to 16.9, and from 13.5 to 5.2 for crew members.

"Among passengers, AGE incidence rates increased with increasing ship size and voyage length," the report said. "For crew members, rates were significantly higher on extra-large ships (19.8 per 100,000 travel days) compared with small and large ships and on voyages lasting 6–7 days."

Winslow noted that outbreaks tend to take place in congregate settings, particularly where people are consuming food and beverages. He noted that a cruise ship is also a "closed environment" where people cannot as easily distance themselves from others.

"I look at a cruise ship as really kind of a perfect storm for a number of environmental factors," Winslow said.

However, norovirus outbreaks on cruises comprise only 1% of all those reported. Winslow said that other settings where the virus is likely to spread include universities, nursing homes and "even hospitals."

How can cruise passengers protect themselves?

Winslow recommended "very frequent hand-washing" throughout the day, and particularly before meals. He noted hand sanitizer is not very effective against norovirus.

"Alcohol-based, gel sanitizers are certainly better than nothing, but I certainly would encourage people, if it's available, to do mechanical hand-washing with soap and water," he said.

The CDC recommended disinfecting contaminated surfaces and using hot water when doing laundry. Cruise lines also have "strict cleaning and sanitation practices" developed with public health authorities, including the CDC, according to industry trade organization Cruise Lines International Association.

If passengers develop symptoms, it's a good idea to report them to onboard medical personnel. Typically, cruise lines temporarily isolate those who fall ill to help curb the spread.

While there is no specific medication used to treat norovirus, the CDC said people who are infected should drink fluids to keep from getting dehydrated.

Knowles said Cunard's crew "all tried to be very helpful" and were deployed with hand sanitizer to spritz guests' hands before they entered any dining areas. She said the company also refunded her family's drink package charges, the cost of a missed shore excursion and a portion of their internet fee.

"This is a beautiful ship, too," she said. "It's not one of these mega ships where you're in crowded spaces. You have so much privacy and space. However, you still have a lot of people in what you could call close quarters, and in my opinion, there's no way you could ever contain anything."

Komando

Continued from Page 5B

payment card information to 'resolve the issue.' In some cases, they'll install malware on your device, stealing passwords and financial details in the background."

How to spot and stop it

PayPal will never send invoices for random purchases you didn't authorize. If something seems off, trust your instincts and double-check before taking action.

- **Check the details.** Look at the sender's email and transaction history. If it's not a company or person you recognize, it's likely a scam.
- **Double-check the invoice recipient.** That's another glaring red flag in this case. All the emails I saw had someone other than my husband listed in small text at the top. Look carefully.
- **Don't call any of the phone numbers listed.** This is smart with any strange invoice, call, document, email, text, or whatever. Don't use the contact info that's included. Go to the official website to find it.

I looked this one up for you: PayPal's real support number is 1-888-221-1161. They take calls from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. PST every day.

When in doubt, your best bet is to contact customer service. They're much more familiar with scam patterns than most regular folks since they see them day in and day out.

When in doubt, your best bet is to contact customer service. They're much more familiar with scam patterns than most regular folks since they see them day in and day out. Plus, they can look into your account to tell you what is a legitimate request and what's not.

If you're sure the invoice is fake, delete it. But first:

Report it to PayPal. Consider this your good deed of the day. Reporting scams doesn't just help you – it helps everyone. When you flag fake invoices to PayPal, its team can track patterns, shut down scammers' accounts and warn others about similar tactics.

- Sign in to your PayPal account, then visit the Resolution Center, where you can report suspicious invoices.
- Even easier, forward the email to phishing@paypal.com to alert their security team.

Lock down your account for extra security

If you don't have two-factor authentication set up, don't wait. It only takes a minute. Now you'll get a code when you sign in. Annoying? A little. But it's worth the extra step on any account tied to your finances.

- Sign in to your PayPal account on a browser. Click the **Settings icon** > **Security** > **2-step verification**. You can use an authenticator app or receive codes as text messages. Pro tip: An authenticator app is the more secure option.
- Follow the onscreen directions to finish up.

Scams like this are sneaky, but they're easy to spot if you know what to look for. Share this with your friends and family so they don't fall for it.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of USA TODAY. Learn about all the latest technology on the Kim Komando Show, the nation's largest weekend radio talk show.

Kim takes calls and dispenses advice on today's digital lifestyle, from smartphones and tablets to online privacy and data hacks.

For her daily tips, free newsletters and more, visit her website.

50★States

News from across the USA

ALABAMA Birmingham: A pizza delivery driver in Birmingham was fatally shot while making a stop on New Year's night, police said.

ALASKA Anchorage: Authorities said more than 317 pounds of illegal drugs were seized by state officials in 2024 at the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, nearly doubling the amount confiscated in 2023, Alaska Beacon reported.

ARIZONA Fort Mohave: The Mohave County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to reverse a zoning designation for a plot of undeveloped land in Fort Mohave that would have allowed a polluting natural gas "peaker plant" to be built less than half a mile from residents' homes.

ARKANSAS Little Rock: The United States Department of Justice has awarded a three-year, $1.9 million grant to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences' Institute for Digital Health & Innovation to start an emergency response program for schools in Little Rock, KATV reported.

CALIFORNIA Sacramento: Most of California's Dungeness crab fishing will be able to return on Jan. 5. The state Department of Fish and Wildlife announced last month it will open commercial Dungeness crab fishing from the Sonoma-Mendocino county line to the U.S.-Mexico border.

COLORADO Leadville: The city is making it easier for skiers, snowboarders and workers to access nearby Ski Cooper on weekends with the launch of a new free weekend shuttle service beginning Saturday.

CONNECTICUT Thompson: Authorities are warning residents about an increased number of rabid raccoons in the Thompson, Webster, and Dudley areas, WFSB reported.

DELAWARE Dover: Delaware is the eighth most concerned state about electronic waste, according to a new analysis of Google search data. The analysis found that about 21 out of every 10,000 Delawareans searched for terms related to electronic waste recycling. The Environmental Protection Agency defines electronic waste, also called e-waste, as used electronics that are discarded, donated, or given to a recycler.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington: Security tightened across the nation's capital after Wednesday's vehicular attack in New Orleans, which killed 10 people and injured at least 35, but there is no known threat to the city, authorities said. The Metropolitan Police Department heightened its security posture across the city "out of an abundance caution" after the New Orleans attack, although there is no known threat to the city, according to Paris Lewbel, deputy director of communications for the department.

FLORIDA Gainesville: Area residents hoping to visit the Florida Museum of Natural History before it closes for an extended period of time for major renovations will now have a little bit more time to make those plans. The Florida Museum's $30 million expansion project, which was originally budgeted at $20 million and expected to start in January, will now begin after its closure on March 24. The museum anticipates reopening in 2026.

GEORGIA Augusta: A Richmond County school principal has been charged with impaired driving.

HAWAII Honolulu: Two people are dead and about 20 injured after a fireworks incident in Honolulu, officials with the city's emergency medical services said.

IDAHO Eagle: A family is suing the West Ada School District, the superintendent and Ada County, alleging that two of their daughters experienced discrimination and racism, KTVB reported.

ILLINOIS Peoria: Peoria has the highest property taxes in the country relative to market value of homes, according to a study of 342 of the largest cities. SmartAsset ranked cities based on the "median annual real estate taxes paid on owner-occupied homes with a mortgage relative to the median home value of such households."

INDIANA South Bend: By spring of 2025, the former Portage Township Trustee Office will turn into a haven for residents age 60 and older to play games, enjoy educational talks, socialize, eat and find services. The nonprofit REAL Services plans to turn it into a senior activity center.

HIGHLIGHT: NEW JERSEY

Meridith and Jon Zois stand with their 8-year-old daughter, Violet, in front of their new Union Beach home in October. TANYA BREEN/USA TODAY NETWORK

Union Beach: Twelve years after their hollowed-out yellow house became a global symbol of Superstorm Sandy's devastation, Jon and Meridith Zois, along with their 8-year-old daughter Violet, are moving into a new house on the property, crossing the finish line at the end of an exhausting journey. Since they evacuated to escape the storm surge in October 2012, the Zoises got married, had a daughter, acquired the property from their family, and navigated obstacles from financing to inspections before finally moving in. The project adds to a post-Sandy transformation in Union Beach.

IOWA Des Moines: Des Moines Area Community College has filed a motion requesting that Drake University increase the amount of its injunction bond tenfold as the college works to eliminate a logo at the center of a heated legal dispute.

KANSAS Topeka: The Kansas Department of Corrections last week paroled Shane Mays, who was involved in a 2017 Topeka triple murder in which he said his only choices were to assist or be killed. Mays was released to post-incarceration status in the state of Arizona, the department said on its website.

KENTUCKY Louisville: Busing could be restored for some magnet school students in a couple months, according to a release from Jefferson County Public Schools. A total of 68 former TARC drivers are now certified to drive school buses, a number that could allow JCPS leaders to renew routes that had been cut at the start of this school year in order to provide on-time service to the majority of bus riders.

LOUISIANA Tensas Parish: A military veteran who earned a Purple Heart as a combat soldier harvested what may be the largest black bear in Louisiana during the state's first hunting season in two generations. Deron Santiny of Lafayette landed the 696-pound male bear in Tensas Parish during the season that ran from Dec. 7 to 22. Ten bears were harvested through 11 permits issued by lottery.

MAINE Machias: State officials are classifying a fire as undetermined due to the significant damage it caused to a large section of the Bluebird Motel last week, News Center Maine reported.

MARYLAND Salisbury: The Salisbury Police Department has announced the death of retired K9 Miso, who served the department from 2011 to 2020.

MASSACHUSETTS Boston: Massachusetts has taken a significant step toward addressing the environmental threat of abandoned fishing gear, commonly known as "ghost gear," with passage of a new law that grants the state the authority to remove it from its waters.

MICHIGAN Houghton County: Michigan boasts two updated National Historic Landmarks – both nestled in the state's far northwest in the Keweenaw Peninsula. The recent update to the Calumet Historic District and Quincy Mining Company Historic District National Historic Landmarks preserves the heritage of the mining communities in northern Michigan's Copper Country.

MINNESOTA St. Joseph: A St. Joseph bakery has been named one of the best bakeries in the U.S. in a new list from the New York Times. Flour & Flower, located in downtown St. Joseph, was one of two Minnesota bakeries included in the list.

MISSISSIPPI Jackson: Meteorologists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are predicting Mississippi's winter to be warmer and drier than average, but not quite warm enough to bust out the shorts and flip flops.

MISSOURI Springfield: An investigation by the Missouri Ethics Commission found "reasonable grounds" that Truth In Politics – a group which primarily sought to influence the outcome of Springfield school board races – repeatedly violated campaign finance laws.

MONTANA Helena: Gov. Greg Gianforte and two state agencies filed a lawsuit against Yellowstone National Park's bison management plan, alleging that its adoption violates federal laws, KPAX reported.

NEBRASKA Lyons: Volunteers from the Working Cat Project rescued 35 cats from rough conditions inside a home after the homeowner died, WOWT reported.

NEVADA North Las Vegas: Police said a 12-year-old girl accused of stabbing and killing her father was arrested, KTNV reported.

NEW HAMPSHIRE Concord: Beginning in 2025, New Hampshire must provide lawyers to children in some family law cases, including abuse and neglect proceedings where a child has been removed from their home or is likely to be, New Hampshire Public Radio reported.

NEW MEXICO Clovis: Several employees of Southwest Cheese factory were injured and hospitalized Monday after an industrial accident occurred according to Curry County Sheriff's Office.

NEW YORK New York: For 761 terrifying days, Anne Frank hid in the stifling quarters of a secret annex in Amsterdam during World War II. It was in that secret annex where the 13-year-old penned her iconic diary. This month, visitors to a Manhattan exhibit will be able to immerse themselves in a full-scale replica of that hideaway. "Anne Frank: The Exhibition" will debut at the Center for Jewish History near Union Square on Jan. 27 – International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

NORTH CAROLINA Wilmington: A woodpecker native to North Carolina that was once seen as being on the cusp of disappearing from the state's longleaf pine forests is now being heralded as an example of what can happen when public and private partners work together. In late October, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reclassified the red-cockaded woodpecker from endangered to threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

NORTH DAKOTA Fargo: A police officer who was arrested for driving under the influence and other charges was placed on paid administrative leave, KVRR reported.

OHIO Columbus: More often than not, consumers don't save money when they pick an electricity choice plan, rather than the standard electricity offer, according to a study from Ohio State University. Instead, they pay more, the study found.

OKLAHOMA Oklahoma City: The executive agency that oversees Oklahoma higher education has received a fifth consecutive multi-year federal grant, this one for $34.7 million, to administer a program designed to help more than 16,000 secondary students in 13 rural school districts prepare for and succeed in college.

OREGON Salem: Oregonians threw away a record amount of garbage in 2022, the most recent annual report from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality shows. The state's households and businesses landfilled or incinerated a total of 3.7 million tons of waste in 2022, or an average of 1,724 pounds per person, the report found. That's technically 8.8% less than the previous year. But the 2021 total was artificially boosted by disposal of nearly 400,000 tons of debris from large wildfires that destroyed more than 6,000 structures in late 2020 and 2021.

PENNSYLVANIA Harrisburg: Making the middle class in Pennsylvania is getting harder as the national average is growing. Pennsylvania ranks 25th in the country with the highest income range to qualify for middle class, according to a report by GoBankingRates, and it will get tougher still as the Keystone State's minimum wage remains stagnant at $7.25 per hour since 2009, while 23 other states announced pay hikes for 2025.

RHODE ISLAND Providence: In what the City Council describes as an "environmental justice win," the state Superior Court upheld a ban on storing bulk liquid propane in Providence.

SOUTH CAROLINA Columbia: South Carolina Department of Transportation officials announced that a bridge in northern Richland County will be closed starting Monday for maintenance and repairs, WLTX reported.

SOUTH DAKOTA Pierre: Legislators could soon be asked to impose a higher tax on employers to cover the administrative expenses of the state's unemployment assistance program, but a lower tax to fund the program's payouts to unemployed people, sparking concerns of an unequal impact on businesses, South Dakota Searchlight reported.

TENNESSEE Nashville: Standardized test scores for students using Tennessee's school vouchers have improved but continue to lag behind their peers statewide, according to data released by the state.

TEXAS Austin: Project Connect, Austin's embattled multibillion-dollar mass transit plan, cleared a major legal hurdle recently but still faces numerous other challenges that cast doubt on its ultimate fate.

UTAH Salt Lake City: Salt Lake County Library announced that more than 12.5 million items were checked out in 2024, ranking the library system in the top 10 highest circulating libraries in the nation, KSL reported.

VERMONT Franklin County: A backyard flock of birds in Vermont tested positive for bird flu last month, state officials announced. The flock of 24 birds, which were in Franklin County, was put down, officials said.

VIRGINIA Isle of Wight: A Virginia man was arrested last month after investigators found what the Federal Bureau of Investigation described as the largest seizure of explosive devices in the agency's history, prosecutors said in court documents. Federal agents executing a search warrant found more than 150 apparent explosive devices on the man's farm, according to court records.

WASHINGTON Olympia: More employees working directly with patients at Washington hospitals will be protected from mandatory overtime starting next year. A new law protects staff working at acute hospitals, in direct patient or clinical settings, who earn an hourly wage or are covered by a collective bargaining agreement from forced overtime. That excludes contract and travel staff.

WEST VIRGINIA Fairmont: The Marion County Humane Society reported that pet adoptions increased in 2024, WDTV reported.

WISCONSIN Milwaukee: Brecken's Blessings, a local nonprofit, said Children's Wisconsin refused to accept toy drive donations allegedly because the organization's logo includes the word "blessings." The hospital has since apologized.

WYOMING Cheyenne: The governor's office announced that a complaint filed by eight qualified electors is asking Gov. Mark Gordon to consider the removal of Weston County Clerk Becky Hadlock from office, alleging "acts of misconduct and malfeasance," WyoFile reported.

From USA TODAY Network and wire reports

TRAVEL

Samantha Brown on 25 years in travel

TV personality has new season of 'Places to Love'

Nathan Diller
USA TODAY

Travel expert Samantha Brown's career has been its own journey.

After going to college for musical theater, Brown moved to New York City to pursue acting. "And so that means I waited on tables for a good eight years and went to auditions," she told USA TODAY. One of those was for the Travel Channel show "Great Vacation Homes," which she booked in 1999.

Brown is marking 25 years as a travel TV host with the return of her Emmy-winning series, "Samantha Brown's Places to Love." The show's eighth season, which begins airing Friday on PBS, takes her from German cities like Berlin and Leipzig to Traverse City, Michigan, and North Carolina's Crystal Coast, to name a few. USA TODAY caught up with Brown ahead of the premiere to talk about how travel has changed over her quarter-century career, what she's learned about community, and why flyers shouldn't go straight to baggage claim after landing at an airport.

Samantha Brown visits Costa Rica in Season 8 of "Samantha Brown's Places to Love." PROVIDED BY PBS

Question: Over the course of 25 years, how do you feel like the travel industry has changed?

Answer: It's like night and day. I think, when I started 25 years ago, we, of course, had the internet, but it wasn't so (much) a part of our travel lives. I didn't even travel with a laptop. I traveled with a thesaurus because I was the writer of the show. So, I just needed other words to inspire me, so I wouldn't say "quintessential" all the time or "quaint" all the time.

But, I think with the internet, that really democratized travel in so many ways, even more than just making flights more available. That sort of created where, now people had access to flights, not just travel agents. And it felt like maybe the travel agency world did have a lock on a lot of opportunities where the internet just opened that up to everybody. (That) doesn't mean it's any easier planning travel. I think that's where travel agents are really great at their job, and you can see how much time they do spend because you fall into a rabbit hole now of information. But anyone can travel.

Before, when I started traveling, I thought it was really for the privileged – people privileged with money, time and then confidence. And I think with the internet and YouTube and social media, you see your type of person traveling. Maybe it's a budget traveler. Maybe it's someone with a lot more diversity than I represent, and all of a sudden now it becomes more attainable to you, and I think that's the brilliant way that it's really changed things.

I know it's so hard to choose favorite destinations, but I was curious if you have any most memorable trips?

I still, to this day, love China ... I went there, I think, in 2007 before the big 2008 Olympics. I mean, with the Great Wall, and the Forbidden Palace, and the Summer Palace, it just knocked my socks off. And I really enjoyed the people, too. I loved getting to know them and our differences.

A lot of us know Europe. We're brought up with European history. It's such a part of American history. ... And so I found a lot about being in Europe was having to flex what I knew, or if I didn't know it, then I felt like an ignorant American. But China just opened me up. I felt like I could be like a 5-year-old kid and just enjoy it, and no one was gonna go, "Why don't you know that?" So, I loved that feeling.

And then I would say in the United States, to bring it home really close, Santa Fe, New Mexico. It's my absolute favorite city here in the United States. ... It's such a confluence of Native American (and) Spanish influence and cultures. I've done four different series there, shows, episodes, and then I brought my mother and my sister on separate trips. So that's the city I've returned to, not just for professional reasons, but for personal ones.

So much of 'Places to Love' focuses on the people that make up a place. What have you learned about people and communities and their role in travel through the show?

I just learned that it's everything about that personal connection. That's, to me, travel. I started to care less and less about the monuments and the castles, the cathedrals because they always keep you in the past. But when you're meeting with people, you are more in the moment – and possibly in the future – because you get to interact with what's happening now.

> **"Before, when I started traveling, I thought it was really for the privileged – people privileged with money, time and then confidence. And I think with the internet and YouTube and social media, you see your type of person traveling."**
> **Samantha Brown**

And when I first started doing (the Travel Channel show) "Passport to Europe," it was more like the check-off-the-list, you know, the monuments that you go to, the museums and the artwork that you see. And that left me actually kind of lonely as a traveler, personally. I didn't feel like I had the travel bug when that was the focus. But then, now, with my own show and me calling the shots, it's all people-driven because they completely change how a place affects you.

You've said that you like to focus on places that aren't necessarily the big, marquee travel destinations. What makes a good location for an episode of 'Places to Love'?

Definitely, things going on. We don't do remote places where there's nothing happening. So we do, like, small cities.

They have something else going on that maybe people don't know about on the surface. So maybe there's a history, like in Huntsville, Alabama, it's NASA and this incredible base of science and rocket and space exploration. And yet, it's an affordable place to live, and so artists are there as well. ... So there has to be an affordability (and) I would guess a high quality of life for the civilians who live there now. That's automatically going to make a great travel destination because they support that.

I always say if you're just looking for yourself, something quick in your own, like, a two-hour sphere to travel to, look for independent bookstores. That's going to be a magnet for other great shops, cafes, restaurants. If that town or small city supports an independent bookstore, you want to go there.

In these 25 years, I imagine that you have amassed some wisdom in your travels. If you have any top travel tips, what would they be?

I think people feel most in need of tips when it comes to the airport because that's still a phenomenally intimidating experience for a lot of people.

One, to alleviate 90% of the stress, get there in plenty of time. And what that means to me is that I base my getting to the airport on the boarding time of a flight, not the departure time. ... But if I time it so I'm walking in the door of the airport, whether I need to check in or go right through security, a good two hours before the boarding time, I've already built in that time and I know I don't have to stress. I increase that time depending on the time of year. So if it's summer travel, I'm going to make that three hours. Another great tip I have for people that they don't think about at the airport is when they arrive at the airport and you get off your flight, the first thing everyone does is look for the baggage claim and the exit signs. Slow down and take a look around – kind of plan your return. Airports are pretty cool places these days. So, is there a cool local restaurant that you see, like, "Oh, I'd like to eat there," or is there a place to get just a quick massage? ... Always check out the security line, which you usually have a view of as you're heading out. Is it chaos? How are they handling it? And all of this goes to inform you of your return. For traveling with children – I have twins, they're 11 now, but we traveled extensively since they were 2-months-old. It was a game changer for my husband and I: We never used the preboard to board our kids. So, we waited at the gate and parent number one or caregiver number one used the preboard to load in all of the gear. ... They load everything in, and then I would wait with the kids until the very last person of the very last zone is called. We would walk on, get the kids settled and we would hopefully depart in 10 minutes.

People forget that the boarding of the flight is absolutely, by far, the most stressful part of the plane trip, even for adults. We're so nervous, we're shoving bags in the overhead bin. You can feel the tension in that cabin, and children just absorb it. And then, when they get to a cruising altitude of 30,000 feet, they release it.

Is there anything you're particularly excited for people to see in the new season of 'Places to Love'?

Like all of our seasons, we really do a wide scope of travel options. We did Costa Rica, but we went in July, and that's the rainy season, and everyone's like, "Well, why would you go in July?" And it's actually a phenomenal time. ... Prices are lower, and it rains, but so what? It's 85 degrees out. It doesn't bother you at all. It actually feels really refreshing.

The one I'm really excited about is that we're completing Route 66 and we're in the middle of it now. Route 66 turns 100 in 2026, and so we started in Illinois last year, and we realized, *Oh, we should do the whole thing*. So, this year, we completed from St. Louis, the (Gateway Arch), all the way to Santa Fe. And then this year – we haven't shot it yet – we'll pick up in Albuquerque, New Mexico and make it all the way to California.

So we're in the middle. And what I love about the middle is it's Oklahoma and Kansas and the panhandle of Texas. These are places that few people travel to, and the history there and the people are fascinating. ... And you really come away with it thinking, *Man, what an amazing country we live in*.

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Patrick Mahomes passed over for QB slots at Pro Bowl, 2C

Dan Wolken column: Peach Bowl shows College Football Playoff's potential to be great, **3C**

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E2

Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith runs for a touchdown in the second quarter against Oregon during the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day. He finished with seven receptions for 187 yards and two TDs. JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/IMAGN IMAGES

YOUTH SERVED

Ohio State receiver Jeremiah Smith dominates Rose Bowl

Jordan Mendoza
USA TODAY

PASADENA, Calif. – It's only been 14 games, but Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly had already seen enough of receiver Jeremiah Smith to make his proclamation.

"He's the best receiver in the country, and he showed it tonight," Kelly told USA TODAY Sports.

It's hard to argue.

As the College Football Playoff stage gets bigger, the Buckeyes freshman receiver continues to shine. His latest offering: a dominant performance against top-seeded Oregon in the Rose Bowl to get his team into the semifinals. He finished the day with seven catches for 187 yards – a career high that broke the school record for receiving yards in a game by a freshman – and two touchdowns. He was named Rose Bowl offensive MVP.

It only took three plays for his impact to be felt Wednesday. Smith took a short toss from quarterback Will Howard and evaded multiple tacklers before jogging into the end zone for a 45-yard touchdown.

As he made his way into the end zone, he held up a peace sign and signaled to the Oregon fans in the crowd to quiet down, and that's pretty much what they did anytime No. 4 got his hands on the ball.

Smith was doing it about any way he wanted to. He was winning one-on-one matchups against a top-10 passing defense and he was maneuvering through the secondary to find himself wide open for big plays. Each time Howard threw the ball toward Smith's direction, you could sense the impending doom awaiting the Oregon fans and the anticipation to celebrate for the scarlet and gray.

What's more impressive about Smith's performance is that most of his damage came in the first half. Smith had five catches for 161 yards as Ohio State was comfortably ahead 34-8 at the break, while Oregon had accumulated only 131 total yards.

It's been quite the run for Smith since a loss to Michigan knocked the Buckeyes out of the Big Ten title game. Through two playoff games, Smith now has 13 catches for 290 yards and four touchdowns as Ohio State has gone up against two of the top defensive units in the country.

There may have been an extra incentive for Smith to show out against Oregon. Leading up to the Rose Bowl, he recalled the disappointment of the one-point loss to the Ducks in October and how that experience helped Wednesday's performance.

"We knew we had to get the ball to the perimeter, take shots and just win one-on-one matchups, and that's what we did," Smith said.

Oregon coach Dan Lanning had an idea of Smith's capabilities in that first meeting as he finished with nine catches for 100 yards and a touchdown.

Now after seeing Smith befuddle his defense again, Lanning believes he's ready for the next level – even if he has to wait two more seasons.

"He's strong, attacks the ball in the air as well as any receiver I've ever seen. The guy is NFL-ready. He's that talented and that special," Lanning said. "He's got all the tools. A really talented player."

There is some irony that Ohio State is full of veterans and transfers lured through name, image and likeness, yet it's a true freshman who is setting the tone in the postseason.

But that was the feeling Buckeyes coach Ryan Day had when Smith first stepped foot on campus.

You just aren't the nation's top recruit by accident. Day said Smith has a serious demeanor and isn't one to talk much, but whenever he does speak up, "people listen."

"He had a look in his eye he wanted to make an impact as a freshman," Day said.

It's clear there's maturity, accountability and confidence in Smith. He recalled telling Howard, who had his own big day with 319 passing yards and three touchdowns, just to get the ball to him and other receivers and they'll make the play for him.

"It doesn't matter if it's a bad ball or not, we'll make our quarterback look good," Smith said.

Ohio State has been a cottage industry of producing standout receivers in recent years. Smith is looking every bit of someone who will be on the NFL draft stage in 2027. Before then, Buckeyes fans have the rest of this playoff run and more to marvel at their new star.

"He's got a couple more years until he goes, but he's as good as I've ever seen," Kelly said.

COMMENTARY

Ewers saves Texas from CFP disaster

Cedric Golden
Austin American-Statesman
USA TODAY NETWORK

ATLANTA – When future Longhorn generations speak of Quinn Ewers, let's hope there's an old codger around to tell them about that New Year's Day thriller back in 2025 when he saved Texas' season with the three biggest throws of his college career.

Wednesday's 39-31 overtime win/escape over upset-minded Arizona State in the College Football Playoff quarterfinals had more storylines than a "Game of Thrones" marathon, and the fifth-seeded Longhorns have to figure out why their offense stalled in the middle two quarters in the Peach Bowl after they came out breathing fire to take a 14-3 lead in the opening 12 minutes.

The good news is that they get to figure that out while preparing for their second straight CFP semifinal. Texas (13-2) will play eighth-seeded Ohio State (12-2), which dispatched top-seeded Oregon 41-21, on Jan. 10 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

Give it up for Ewers, who is easily the most polarizing Texas quarterback since Chris Simms, but unlike the big-armed lefty who's remembered more for those four first-half turnovers in the 2001 Big 12 title game loss to Colorado, Ewers will be remembered for some clutch performances, including Wednesday, his finest hour to date.

Ewers was 20 of 30 for 322 yards, three touchdown passes and one interception, and added a rushing score. He rallied Texas at the end of regulation and again in the first overtime and won it in the second.

"It's just a testament to how mature this team is and just taking advantage of every single opportunity that we have," Ewers said. "Whether it be fourth-and-15 or first-and-10, whatever the situation is, just taking full advantage of the opportunity that's thrown our way."

The play that saved Longhorns' football season

There comes a time in an athlete's career when the walls close in and hope appears to be slipping out the

See EWERS, Page 2C

Quarterback Quinn Ewers scores a Peach Bowl TD in the fourth quarter to give Texas a 24-8 lead Wednesday. SARA DIGGINS/AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Coaches bracing for feared day after Week 18

Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz
USA TODAY

Has the NFL's hot seat season already reached its peak temperature?

As the league approaches Week 18 and the dreaded "Black Monday" for staffs everywhere, three teams – the New York Jets, New Orleans Saints and Chicago Bears – already have created vacancies by firing their coaches. History suggests more action is bound to follow.

But unless several teams match the surprising upheaval of last year, in which eight teams made changes, this cycle could end up looking something closer to the fallout of two years ago, when just two coaches (Kliff Kingsbury and Lovie Smith) were dismissed after three in-season firings (Matt Rhule, Frank Reich and Nathaniel Hackett).

Giants head coach Brian Daboll, right, shakes hands with Cowboys counterpart Mike McCarthy after their game in September. SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

Still, there's sure to be plenty of intrigue in the next week and beyond. Here's our look at the NFL coaches with the hottest seats ahead of this weekend's regular-season finales:

1. Doug Pederson, Jacksonville Jaguars

When the Jaguars suffered their worst loss in franchise history with a 52-6 rout at the hands of the Detroit Lions, many expected a coaching change would be made ahead of the bye week. Then ... nothing happened. Still, while Jacksonville squeezed two more victories out of its matchups with the Tennessee Titans since then, there's not much to suggest that there is – or should be – a strong push to keep Pederson.

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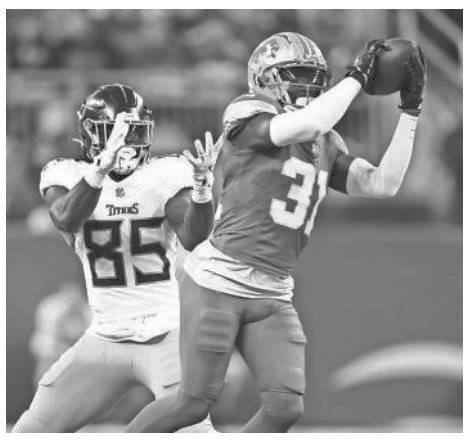
Mahomes passed over for Pro Bowl QB slots

Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz
USA TODAY



Lions safety Kerby Joseph (31) makes our list of the Pro Bowl defense snubs, at sports.usatoday.com. GETTY IMAGES

The announcement of rosters for the Pro Bowl Games comes at a fitting time on the NFL calendar: as a pit stop to something more substantive, namely Week 18 and the regular season's end.

The selections themselves still stand as somewhat of a distinction for an event still trying to establish its relevance with its audience amid its evolving format. And while arguing about Pro Bowl snubs can seem a bit outlandish given that many players will be added later as dropouts materialize, the debates over who deserves the recognition are yet another example of the league managing to spark interest and intrigue around developments that aren't particularly consequential.

With that said, the most notable omissions on offense from Thursday's announcement, along with an examination of how strong each player's case is:

Patrick Mahomes, QB, Chiefs

Unlike the other players on this list, Mahomes doesn't have much of a case for inclusion on the initial list, as the stacked group of AFC quarterbacks features three legitimate MVP candidates in the Buffalo Bills' Josh Allen, Baltimore Ravens' Lamar Jackson and Cincinnati Bengals' Joe Burrow, all of whom are largely more statistically accomplished this season than the two-time NFL MVP. Still, only a field this loaded could relegate Mahomes to alternate status after he was selected to the Pro Bowl in his first six years as a starter.

Mahomes has engineered a career-high five fourth-quarter comebacks and seven game-winning drives this season, routinely proving to be the difference for a team that has gone 11-0 in one-score games. But while he has also completed a personal-best 67.5% of his passes, he's also averaging an all-time low of 6.8 yards per attempt while navigating the Chiefs' myriad issues up front and in the receiving corps, though those problems have largely been smoothed out in recent weeks. Here's betting a guy who has every reason to want to avoid playing in this game as he aims for a historic three-peat is probably unbothered.

A.J. Brown, WR, Eagles

Brown might have been done in by the three games he missed due to a hamstring injury. Yet he still finished with more receiving yards than Terry McLaurin (1,079 to 1,034) and was far more efficient, with his 3.67 yards per route run only outpaced by the Los Angeles Rams' Puka Nacua among players with at least 200 routes run. Brown's dominance is difficult to fully capture based on volume stats given how the Eagles' run-heavy offense functions, but the overall effect he has is clearly on par with the pass catchers who were included.

Brian Thomas Jr., WR, Jaguars

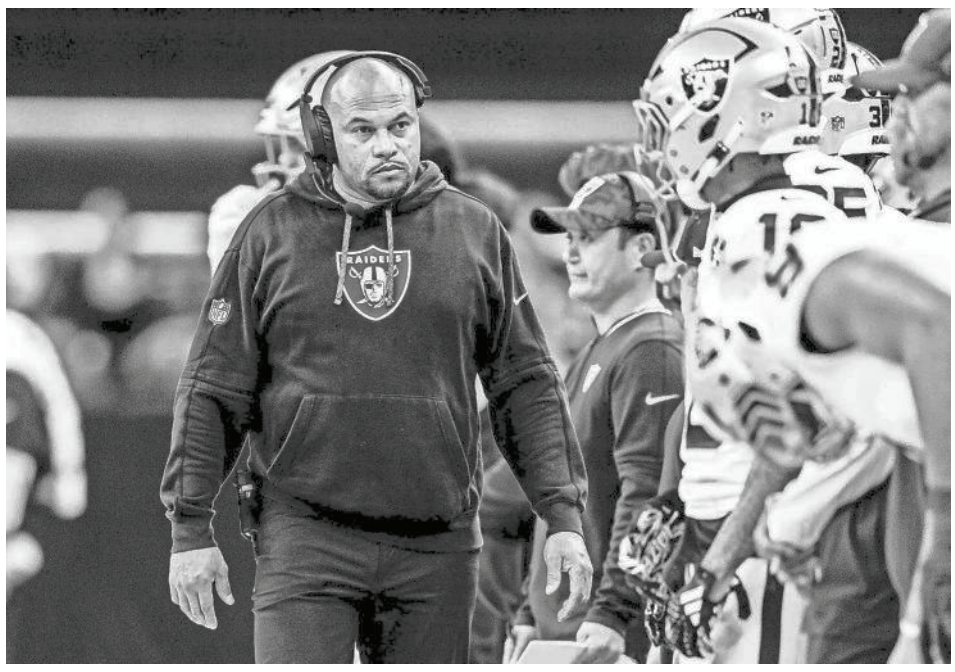
Making the Pro Bowl as a rookie can be exceedingly difficult without the right blend of output, attention and positional opportunity. Thomas certainly had enough of the first category, as he ranks fifth in the NFL in receiving yards (1,179) despite having Trevor Lawrence for just 11 starts this season. But he might have been lacking in the latter two, as the Jaguars have continued to toil in obscurity amid a 4-12 campaign. Thomas also had six more TDs than Jerry Jeudy, who was named a starter despite more than one-fifth of his yardage production coming in one game.

Jonnu Smith, TE, Dolphins

There was little room for discussion about the AFC's tight ends, given the record-setting rookie campaign of Brock Bowers and Travis Kelce placing first in the fan vote. But Smith should be lauded for putting together a career season as an eighth-year veteran. He beat Kelce in receiving yards (828 to 823) and TDs (seven to three) despite having 18 fewer catches and 34 fewer targets. Mark Andrews also merited consideration.

NFL Week 18

Continued from Page 1C



Raiders head coach Antonio Pierce, shown looking on against the Saints during the second half Sunday, is 9-16 in two seasons. STEPHEN LEW/IMAGN IMAGES

Despite later voicing his support for Pederson amid a 1-4 start, owner Shad Khan made clear before the season he believed this was "the best team assembled" by the organization in its history. He's right to be bullish about at least a few integral parts of the Jaguars' setup, with the presence of quarterback Trevor Lawrence, a budding star receiver in Brian Thomas Jr. and the league's weakest division all making this an extremely attractive potential vacancy. While plenty of what has gone wrong has been outside of Pederson's control – including Lawrence making just 10 starts before being knocked out for the season – it seems clear a new voice is needed. Khan hasn't signaled his intent, but this seems like the most clear-cut decision to be made after Week 18.

The more interesting call might be on the fate of general manager Trent Baalke, the architect of a roster rife with high-investment flops. Opting to clean house would surely indicate a more widespread personnel shake-up, but it also could color the coaching search given how Baalke's presence loomed over the search three years ago, according to multiple reports.

2. Antonio Pierce, Las Vegas Raiders

No one can lob tanking accusations at the Silver and Black, as the Raiders won their past two games to push them out of prime position to select a top quarterback in the NFL draft. Beyond that and the record-setting rookie campaign of tight end Brock Bowers, however, there hasn't been much to like about what Las Vegas has produced, even with a roster especially starved for talent after the Davante Adams trade in October. At the NFL league meeting in December, owner Mark Davis said he was "very disappointed" in the results from Pierce and declined to commit to him for 2025, according to The Athletic.

Might this be one of the first opportunities for Tom Brady to shape the organization after the seven-time Super Bowl winner and Fox broadcaster became a minority owner this fall? Davis has said he wants Brady to have a "huge voice" in football matters, particularly when it comes to choosing its next signal-caller. While it's not clear how Brady might view the current regime, Davis' embrace of the legend would seem to indicate a desire to employ a new approach.

3. Mike McCarthy, Dallas Cowboys

Earlier this season, McCarthy might have pushed Pederson for the top spot on the list. With clear expectations to improve on the past three 12-win campaigns that produced just one playoff win, the Cowboys crashed out with a 3-7 start that included repeated embarrassments at home. But despite losing Dak Prescott to a season-ending hamstring injury and several other key starters to significant ailments, Dallas rallied to notch four wins in its following five games before last Sunday's rout by the Philadelphia Eagles.

From the time he opted to bring the coach back following last season's wild-card rout by the Green Bay Packers all the way up to this week, Jerry Jones has been largely laudatory of McCarthy. It's worth noting, however, that Jones also spoke highly of Jason Garrett right up until he decided to part ways with his longtime coach and former quarterback after the 2019 season. Still, McCarthy has received the backing of Prescott and star pass rusher Micah Parsons, which could bolster his case.

Jones said in his weekly radio interview Tuesday he was not under facing any "unusual time frame" to make a call after stringing out his last few coaching decisions, including retaining McCarthy for 2024 and firing Garrett five years ago after an extended wait. But McCarthy is free to pursue opportunities as he pleases with his contract set to expire, and he could be an alluring candidate for other franchises looking for a proven entity.

4. Brian Daboll, New York Giants

Co-owner John Mara went out on a bit of a ledge in late October when he said he didn't "anticipate" making any leadership changes this offseason. The subsequent 10-game losing streak might have complicated matters. While Mara might not be swayed by the banners flying over MetLife Stadium demanding a full organizational teardown, it could be hard to stick with the status quo of what had been the league's lowest-scoring offense prior to the 45-point outburst in Sunday's win over the Indianapolis Colts.

That outcome should at least put to rest any question about the team's resiliency in a season that featured a late-season pivot behind center that led to Daniel Jones' departure. Daboll seemed to drive home a message after the team's skid ended, saying, "If you get good quarterback play, you have an opportunity in every game." As has long been the case, Mara must determine whether he trusts the existing setup to identify and develop the new signal-caller who could determine the trajectory of the franchise for years to come. His earlier statement would seem to indicate he has the confidence to stay the course, but recall what he said three years ago in explaining the decision to fire Joe Judge after just two seasons: "We just got to a point where I thought we had dug ourselves a hole so deep that I didn't see a clear path to getting out of it unless we completely blew it up and started all over again with a new general manager and a new head coach."

5. Jerod Mayo, New England Patriots

If there's one potential surprise to monitor in what otherwise is shaping up to be a relatively tame ride on the coaching carousel, it's in Foxborough, Massachusetts. Robert Kraft has hardly been the picture of an impatient owner, and Bill Belichick left the roster with few building blocks as he was pushed out the door. But a 3-13 season has produced plenty of angst, including "fire Mayo" chants during a 40-7 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers last Saturday. Still, given how resolute Kraft was in appointing Mayo as Belichick's successor, an about-face after one trying season would be a true stunner. The more reasonable course of action might be leveraging what's projected to be a league-high $131 million in cap space, according to OverTheCap.com, and potentially the No. 1 pick in the draft to supercharge a widespread roster reboot.

Ewers

Continued from Page 1C

door. For Ewers, that moment came late in the first overtime with the Longhorns trailing 31-24 and down to their last breath: a fourth-and-13 predicament at the 28-yard line. Fans were coming to grips with the growing reality that time was about to run out on Texas' 2024 season championship dream.

That is, until Ewers put the program on his back and cemented his spot in Texas football lore.

The Horns seemingly had things well in hand after Ewers' fourth-quarter scramble touchdown gave them a 24-8 lead with 10:17 left in the game.

But Arizona State running back Cam Skattebo and quarterback Sam Leavitt brought the 14-point underdogs back from a 16-point deficit by scoring 23 points in a row, the last seven pushing the Horns to the brink of elimination.

Things looked bleak.

It didn't help that Texas kicker Bert Auburn's second missed field goal in the final 69 seconds – what would have been a game winner from 38 yards out – clanked off the upright on the last play of the fourth quarter.

So, there they stood, in overtime, facing a fourth-and-13 from the 28. It was now or a second Atlanta overtime loss and a long offseason.

Ewers, who was sacked three times and harassed for most of the afternoon behind a beaten-up offensive line, signaled for max protection up front, then checked out the called play to a post route. Wideout Matthew Golden, who has been an absolute titan with Isaiah Bond banged up lately, lined up in the slot and beat cornerback Shamari Simmons to the back of the end zone with an ankle-breaking juke at the 15. Ewers' perfectly placed aerial was waiting.

"That was a blessing," Golden said. "I'm a big believer in faith. I just feel like God was preparing me for that situation. So just having Him and my brothers around me … we knew it was going to be a hard-fought battle. We just knew that we just had to come out there and execute."

As UT fans were holding their breath, Auburn made the extra point to send it into a second overtime.

One play later, Ewers, back on the field per overtime rules, hit tight end Gunnar Helm for a 25-yard score followed by a two-point pass to Golden for an eight-point lead.

And then Andrew Mukuba's interception sealed it.

Crisis adverted. Season not over.

Ewers saved his best for last

For coach Steve Sarkisian, it had to be just as big of a relief as it was elation. The Horns went from a 14-point favorite to a 16-point advantage all the way to a seven-point deficit with one play remaining in their season.

Sarkisian was a 1980s kid who grew up in Torrance, California, an LA suburb which is known for being the spot where the rap group NWA was arrested outside the studio by some overzealous cops, as depicted in the movie "Straight Outta Compton."

When asked to describe Ewers' heroics, Sark shook his head and pulled out his best hip-hop reference.

"Quinn is a 'G,'" Sarkisian said, which for you non-rap fans stands for "gangsta." Not "gangster" – save that for the Goodfellas – but for playing with a certain fearlessness that reveals itself when the heat is on.

Texas has its own Eazy E in Ewers, who produced the most scintillating finish of his three seasons on campus. His 322 yards were his third most of the season and included seven completions that went for at least 23 yards. He was the linchpin in Texas becoming the first program to notch a victory in each New Year's Six bowl game.

OK, he doesn't run for 80-yard touchdowns like Vince Young did or throw a great deep ball like Colt McCoy did, but Ewers wins games, and isn't that the goal? He improved to 27-8 as a starter in his biggest moment and, more important, kept the Horns afloat in this tournament.

'I'm so proud of the way the entire team stayed poised and composed through the entire game, especially through overtime," Ewers said. "It definitely feels a lot better to be on this end of the win in overtime at the same spot."

Peach shows CFP's potential to be great

Dan Wolken
Columnist
USA TODAY

Arizona State running back Cam Skattebo has his helmet ripped off after a catch against Texas' Andrew Mukuba on Wednesday. MICHAEL CHOW/THE REPUBLIC

Welcome to the day the College Football Playoff grew up.

And also the day that proved once and for all it needs to kick the bowl games to the curb.

How great is this sport? So great that an Arizona State team held a nation spellbound for a few hours Wednesday afternoon, bringing a March Madness feel to New Year's Day for the first time in College Football Playoff history.

How frustrating is this sport? So frustrating that while Arizona State was ultimately coming up one play short against Texas, the Rose Bowl couldn't see fit to delay the kickoff of Ohio State-Oregon by even a few minutes. And by the time Texas had won its quarterfinal, 39-31 in the second overtime, the Buckeyes were already up 7-0 and had the ball again.

We know the Rose Bowl loves its sunset over the San Gabriel Mountains at the start of the fourth quarter, but come on. College football is this country's second-most popular sport. It needs to act like it and not leave its programming schedule to a bunch of freeloading bowl bureaucrats who add nothing to the texture and fabric of the game in 2025.

College football is so much better than that. The Texas-Arizona State game proved it.

Where's your pining for Alabama now?

After all the agenda-fueled handwringing about the first-round mismatches – led by cranky Kirk Herbstreit, of all people, who chose to be loud and wrong rather than reconsider his biases last week – it's time to separate fact from fanfic.

● The CFP does not need to be expanded to 14 or 16. Adding more teams would be a cynical money grab, and no Playoff-worthy team is getting left out of a 12-team field.

● Despite Lane Kiffin's social media sour grapes, there was no magic bullet team that could have been plugged in to the CFP to change the one-sided nature of most games that have been played so far. Not Alabama, certainly, after its no-show against Michigan in the Reliaquest Bowl. Not South Carolina. Not Miami. And not Kiffin's Ole Miss Rebels.

● The reason we have seen a lot of blowouts in the CFP, even in the four-team format, is that there's a dividing line in college football between the elite and non-elite. It would be in the best interests of the sport to shrink that gap. How do you do it? By putting a non-traditional team like Arizona State on the national stage and letting the players and coaches show how good they are.

● And yet college football is so wrapped up in the idea of tradition that it has let bowl operators dictate how to run their business. So we get empty seats at Playoff games because fans can't budget for three road trips, and we get the Rose Bowl kicking off on an alternate channel because delaying by 15 minutes would be a sunset sacrilege.

Here's the point: Nobody likes to complain about college football more than people who love college football, but often their angst is misdirected.

For all the hate directed at the NIL and transfer portal environment, nothing in the history of college sports has done more to spread out talent and give dozens of programs a chance to compete for something significant.

Despite all the calls for the CFP to include the "best" teams over the most-deserving – as if Herbstreit or anyone else could accurately define what that means – how do you explain dismissed Big 12 champion Arizona State providing one of the best underdog performances in playoff history when the elitists never wanted the Sun Devils in the first place?

It's time to stop nitpicking and let college football do its thing. Does that mean every game is going to be great? Does that mean every underdog is going to look like it belongs? Of course not.

But if you just let the sport breathe a little bit, the talent gap is going to continue to close and you're eventually going to get to a place where a game like Texas-Arizona State is more the norm than the exception. Even Boise State kept things interesting Tuesday night, competing credibly with Penn State for a good portion of the game before falling 31-14.

That's all you can ask for.

Should there be some tweaks? Of course.

Oregon, as the No. 1 seed and the nation's only unbeaten team, should not have had to face Ohio State in the quarterfinals. That can be fixed by a small tweak that allows the CFP selection committee to seed the teams by their true rankings rather than giving priority to the top four conference champions.

There should also be a lengthy conversation about whether quarterfinal games should be on campus rather than neutral sites. But regardless of how that decision goes, it's time for SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey, Big Ten Commissioner Tony Petitti and their colleagues to make it clear that the bowl games have no leverage anymore over this sport.

Think about the absurdity of this: Arizona State has a quarterfinal site in its backyard with the Fiesta Bowl but gets shipped to Atlanta to play Texas. Meanwhile, Georgia has a quarterfinal site in its backyard with the Peach Bowl but gets sent to New Orleans to play Notre Dame because of old contracts that tie conferences to particular bowls.

Meanwhile, because the Rose Bowl apparently has to kick off at 5 p.m. Eastern – and not a minute later – most people wrapped up in a truly great game on Wednesday didn't even know Ohio State-Oregon had started. Talk about giving the fans a middle finger.

But for so many years, rather than treating college football like a real sport, the power brokers, talking-heads bowl stooges have been in the beauty pageant mentality. It's all about "creating matchups" and "the brands" rather than, you know, playing games and showcasing new stars like ASU quarterback Sam Leavitt or coach Kenny Dillingham.

And guess what? In a real sport, you just can't predict when a game is going to be awesome or when it's going to end up lopsided. Who could have guessed that Arizona State would be Cinderella for a few hours on New Year's, while Oregon would fall flat on its face?

Lessons need to be learned from the Peach Bowl. Yeah, the Big 12 may not have been a great conference this season, but its champion went blow-for-blow with the second-best team in the SEC. And even though college football is never going to have the same upset dynamics as the NCAA basketball tournament, it's the Arizona States of the world that are going to grow this sport and turn the CFP into something magical – if they'll just leave it (mostly) alone.

That's the potential we saw on Wednesday. That's the parity the CFP can help grow. That's the excitement fans yearned for when they finally turned it from an invitational into a real Playoff.

It's time for even the skeptics to admit that this thing is working just fine.

REMEMBRANCE

USA TODAY, Golfweek's Steve DiMeglio dies at 63

Jason Lusk
Golfweek
USA TODAY

Longtime PGA Tour writer Steve DiMeglio, whose byline graced the pages of USA TODAY and then Golfweek for decades, has died at his home in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

He was 63.

DiMeglio was diagnosed in 2022 with rectal cancer that had spread to his liver. He was open throughout his treatment, which included dozens of doses of chemotherapy – he kept track of the doses by citing the numbers worn by sports legends.

He often shared his progress and sometimes shared his pain on social media in the hope he might inspire someone to sign up for a cancer screening – or simply to stay in touch with his many friends in the world of golf. The American Cancer Society recently profiled DiMeglio with a video shot at TPC Sawgrass.

A graduate of Mankato West High School in Minnesota and later Minnesota State University, DiMeglio began his professional career as a journalist in 1994 at the Palm Springs Desert Sun. He moved to media company Gannett in 1999, joined USA TODAY in 2000 and a couple of years later took over as the full-time golf beat writer. Gannett acquired Golfweek in 2016, and DiMeglio's byline began to appear under the Golfweek banner in 2019. He continued to write for Golfweek until 2023.

DiMeglio

"Steve was a longtime golf reporter at USA TODAY who covered baseball for years before he changed beats. He was incredibly plugged-in, had some of the best sources in the sport and would do anything you asked as an editor," said Roxanna Scott, executive editor of USA TODAY Sports. "He had a passion for golf that was reflected in his writing and all of the relationships he built through the years. I loved seeing the video of Steve being greeted by Tiger (Woods) in the Bahamas last month. I'm sure that meant a lot to Steve.

"We will all miss Steve's thoughtfulness, his updates on his sports bets and his wonderful storytelling."

DiMeglio covered all the greats of his era on both the men's and women's professional tours. Even during his cancer battle, he stayed in touch with many players, and their support buoyed his spirits. He traveled to a few tournaments over the past year, most recently the Hero World Challenge in December in the Bahamas.

He mentioned on social media that he was thrilled to chat with some of his favorite players, including Tiger Woods, Justin Thomas, Keegan Bradley, Jason Day and caddie Joey LaCava.

"Everybody knows him out here. He's Mr. Golf, USA TODAY forever," four-time PGA Tour winner Billy Andrade said in March after learning he was playing in the PGA Tour Champions' Cologuard Classic in DiMeglio's honor. "One of the great guys of all time."

Justin Thomas has chip on shoulder after Presidents Cup snub

Adam Schupak
Golfweek | USA TODAY NETWORK

KAPALUA, Hawaii – Justin Thomas enters the new golf season with a chip on his shoulder. And he can thank U.S. Presidents Cup captain Jim Furyk for it.

"I haven't had the opportunity to play pissed off for a while, so I'm pretty excited to play a little pissed off this year," Thomas said on Wednesday ahead of the opening round of The Sentry, the kickoff to the 2025 PGA Tour season at Kapalua Resort's Plantation Course.

Thomas wasn't selected by Furyk for the U.S. Presidents Cup team that retained the trophy in the biennial competition in September.

"I didn't deserve to be on the team," Thomas conceded, "but mentally inside my mind I always think and know that I'm going to be a good addition to a team. So, sometimes you have to tell yourself some things. But like I said, I just, I'm excited to -- and I love Jim, we talked many times, and our friendship and relationship hasn't changed at all – but there would be nothing more I would love than about four, five six times this year to text him and say, 'Good call.' "

Justin Thomas plays a shot from the 5th tee Wednesday during practice for The Sentry. MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

Thomas has sweated out being a captain's pick the past two years. Zach Johnson gave him the nod for the 2023 U.S. Ryder Cup team that lost in Rome, but this time Thomas got the bad news via phone while on a trip with his wife, Jill.

"I felt bad for her because it was in the morning," Thomas recalled. "Kind of ruined that day. Pretty sure I ordered a beer at lunch. I needed that one."

Thomas noted that he didn't do a very good job of concealing his disappointment from his wife.

"If I was home, I would have gone straight to the range," Thomas said. "I'm going to prove why I don't think that that was a good decision. Like I said, it was the right decision, but some things you just have to kind of tell yourself."

Thomas is motivated to make sure he secures one of six automatic spots on this fall's U.S. Ryder Cup team so that he doesn't have to rely on U.S. captain Keegan Bradley to spend one of his six picks on him. "It is not a fun place to be in," Thomas said of needing a captain's pick. "Not only waiting for the phone call, but then not knowing how the phone call is going to go, so it's a lot of anxiety and a lot of stress."

Thomas finished tied for 14 in the 2024 FedExCup after an off year by his standards and is returning to Kapalua after a one-year absence. His record at the Plantation Course is impressive, including victories in 2017 and 2020 and two third-place finishes in 2019 and 2021.

The 15-time PGA Tour winner recorded six top-10 finishes in the 2024 season, highlighted by a runner-up at the Zozo Championship in October and a tie for third at the Hero World Challenge in December but hasn't tasted victory since the 2022 PGA Championship. Still, he enters the new year full of confidence that as he approaches age 32, his best golf could still be in front of him.

"Talent doesn't leave your body, it doesn't just go away," he said. "I still fully believe that I can have a year like Scottie (Scheffler) just had. I mean, there's no reason – I think I would be doing myself a disservice if I didn't think I could at least do that. I mean, I have a lot of faith and capability in my game, and I feel like I'm working on the right things, but it doesn't just happen because you think you can and because you think you deserve it, you have to work harder than everybody else, and you have to do the right things."

NFL WEEK 18 PREVIEW

USA TODAY SPORTS

Browns (3-13) at Ravens (11-5)

TV: 4:30 p.m. ET Saturday, CBS

Spread (BetMGM): Ravens by 18

Cleveland could spoil a rival's division title hopes with decent quarterback play. Ravens QB Lamar Jackson is making a case for another MVP award.

Bengals (8-8) at Steelers (10-6)

TV: 8 p.m. ET Saturday, ESPN/ABC

Spread (BetMGM): Bengals by 1.5

Cincinnati needs QB Joe Burrow and WRs Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins to keep their slim playoff hopes alive. The Steelers need to control the line.

Eagles (13-3) at Giants (3-13)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, Fox

Spread (BetMGM): Eagles by 3

The Eagles will hold out key players, so backup QB Kenny Pickett and RB Kenny Gainwell will have to spark the offense against the 2nd-worst rush defense.

Commanders (11-5) at Cowboys (7-9)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, Fox

Spread (BetMGM): Commanders by 5.5

Washington is at its best when QB Jayden Daniels is using his legs and making things happen. Cowboys RB Rico Dowdle should get a healthy number of carries.

Bills (13-3) at Patriots (3-13)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, CBS

Spread (BetMGM): Bills by 2.5

Buffalo must play mistake free and give Bills backup QB Mitch Trubisky a chance to compete. New England QB Drake Maye has been one of the lone bright spots.

Jaguars (4-12) at Colts (7-9)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, CBS

Spread (BetMGM): Colts by 5

Jacksonville has RB Brian Thomas Jr. (1,179 yards, 10 TDs); Colts may have QB Anthony Richardson back.

Saints (5-11) at Buccaneers (9-7)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, NBC

Spread (BetMGM): Bucs by 13.5

For the Buccaneers, win and they earn a fourth consecutive NFC South crown. With a prolific offense led by QB Baker Mayfield, Tampa Bay has scored 25 or more points five times over the past six games. Saints rookie QB Spencer Rattler has struggled.

Panthers (4-12) at Falcons (8-8)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, CBS

Spread (BetMGM): Falcons by 8.5

The Falcons need to beat Carolina and hope the Bucs also lose in order to win the NFC South and gain a playoff spot. Since returning to the starting lineup in Week 8, Panthers QB Bryce Young has looked far more in command than he did before.

Texans (9-7) at Titans (3-13)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, CBS

Spread (BetMGM): Titans by 1.5

The Titans have to make the Texans make mistakes, the key when Tennessee upset the Texans in Houston. The Texans shouldn't be afraid to take things slowly. The Titans play slow, deliberate football too.

Bears (4-12) at Packers (11-5)

TV: 1 p.m. ET Sunday, Fox

Spread (BetMGM): Packers by 10

Chicago must pressure Packers QB Jordan Love by dominating the game up front on defense. For Green Bay, pressure Bears QB Caleb Williams. The Bears rookie took seven sacks last week and has now been sacked 67 times this season.

49ers (6-10) at Cardinals (7-9)

TV: 4:25 p.m. ET Sunday, Fox

Spread: (BetMGM): Cardinals by 4

San Francisco has at least 16 players on injured reserve, including a handful of key starters, and the 49ers will have to grind it out. Arizona QB Kyler Murray has been an interception machine and must be much better at protecting the ball.

Chiefs (15-1) at Broncos (9-7)

TV: 4:25 p.m. ET Sunday, CBS

Spread (BetMGM): Broncos by 10.5

The Broncos need one more victory – or tie – and will advance to the playoffs for the first time since they won Super Bowl 50 with Peyton Manning and Von Miller nearly nine years ago. The game means basically nothing to the Chiefs.

Jets (4-12) vs Dolphins (8-8)

TV: 4:25 p.m. ET Sunday, Fox

Spread (BetMGM): Dolphins by 1

The Dolphins will qualify if they win and the Broncos lose. Miami's record in AFC games (6-5) is one better than Denver's. For Miami, having QB Tua Tagovailoa available will be key. This is potentially the last game of the Aaron Rodgers era with the Jets.

Chargers (10-6) at Raiders (4-12)

TV: 4:25 p.m. ET Sunday, CBS

Spread (BetMGM): Chargers by 4.5

Will Chargers RB J.K. Dobbins keep rolling? He has averaged 7.7 and 13.5 yards per-carry in Los Angeles' past two games. For the Raiders, can QB Aidan O'Connell and TE Brock Bowers keep this game close?

Seahawks (9-7) at Rams (10-6)

TV: 4:25 p.m. ET Sunday, Fox

Spread (BetMGM): Seahawks by 6.5

Seattle has no path to the playoffs. The Seahawks must protect QB Geno Smith from a ferocious pass rush. The Rams need to lean on RB Kyren Williams.

Vikings (14-2) at Lions (14-2)

TV: 8:20 p.m. ET Sunday, NBC

Spread (BetMGM): Lions by 3

Whoever wins this game will win the NFC North Division and home-field advantage for the NFC playoffs. WR Justin Jefferson has scored in each of the last four games for Minnesota. The big question is whether anyone on the Detroit defensive line will be able to bother Vikings QB Sam Darnold.

– USA TODAY SPORTS NETWORK

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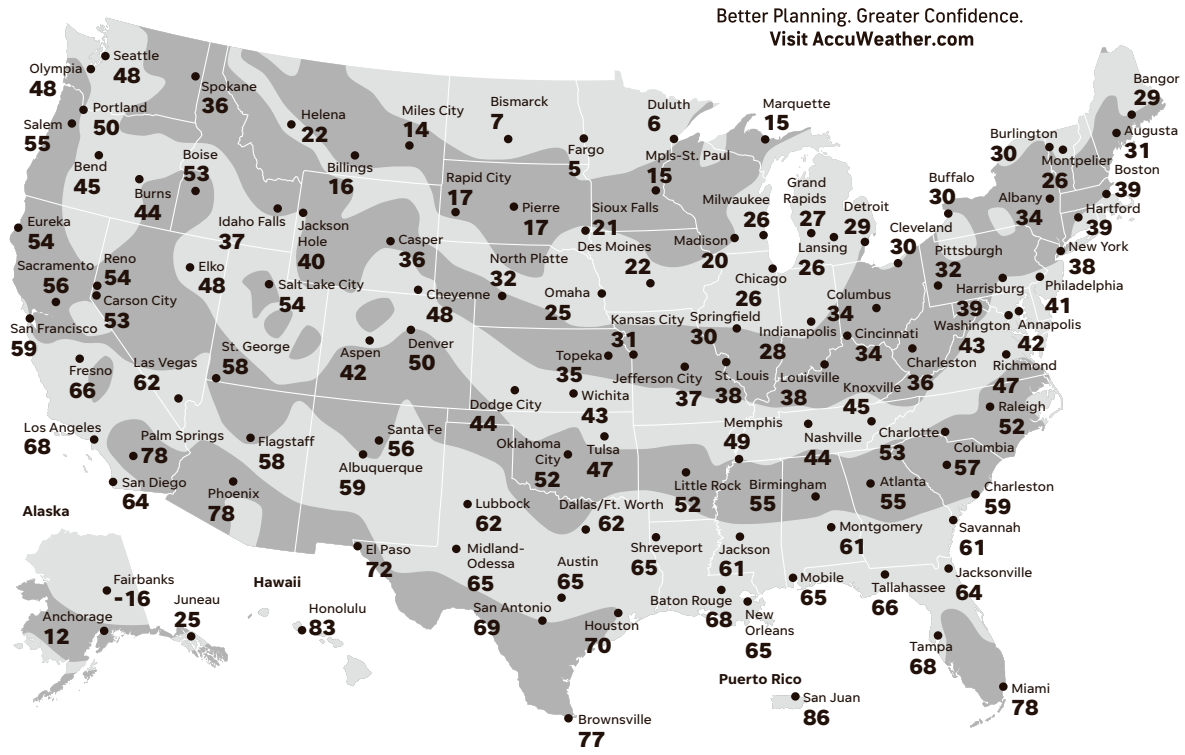
WEEKEND FORECAST

Cold, Arctic air will continue to rush over the **Great Lakes** Friday and through the weekend, helping to create bands of lake-effect snow across parts of **Michigan**, northern **Indiana**, **Ohio**, **Pennsylvania**, **New York** and **West Virginia**.

The heaviest snow can bring new snow amounts over 6 inches, as well as reduced visibility and difficult travel. Blustery conditions will also accompany the snow in this area, helping to bring some snow showers all the way to the **East Coast**.

Meanwhile, a new storm will start to develop in the Central U.S. on Saturday, producing snow and ice from **Nebraska** and **Kansas** to **Missouri** and **Illinois**. The storm will move the area of snow and ice into the **Ohio Valley** Sunday and also threaten severe weather in the South.

FRIDAY'S HIGH TEMPERATURES



U.S. CITIES

	FRI	SAT
Albany, N.Y.	34/21sf	26/21pc
Albuquerque	59/36s	62/31pc
Amarillo, Texas	60/36s	65/22c
Anchorage, Alaska	12/5s	15/9pc
Atlantic City, N.J.	41/27sf	35/26w
Augusta, Ga.	57/28s	51/29s
Austin, Texas	65/55pc	73/63pc
Baton Rouge, La.	68/47pc	58/56pc
Billings, Mont.	16/12sn	16/8sf
Birmingham, Ala.	55/29s	49/40s
Bismarck, N.D.	7/-6c	4/-5c
Boise, Idaho	53/34r	45/36c
Buffalo, N.Y.	30/20sf	26/21sf
Burlington, Vt.	30/17pc	19/12sf
Cedar Rapids, Iowa	21/6s	21/11c
Charleston, S.C.	59/32s	52/33s
Charleston, W.Va.	36/20sn	29/17s
Cheyenne, Wyo.	48/22pc	36/22c
Cincinnati	34/17sf	28/21s
Cleveland	30/20sf	26/19sf
Columbia, S.C.	57/27s	49/28s
Columbus, Ohio	34/19sn	25/16pc
Corpus Christi, Texas	73/63c	78/69pc
Daytona Beach, Fla.	65/44s	60/40s
Des Moines, Iowa	22/10pc	19/12c
Duluth, Minn.	6/-8pc	6/-6s
Durham, N.C.	51/24pc	42/25s
El Paso, Texas	72/43s	74/44pc
Fairbanks, Alaska	-16/-28s	-17/-24s
Flagstaff, Ariz.	58/32pc	49/15w
Fargo, N.D.	5/-7c	4/-11c
Fort Myers, Fla.	74/50s	68/48s
Fort Wayne, Ind.	28/18sf	23/15pc
Fresno, Calif.	66/43pc	57/41pc
Green Bay, Wis.	20/7s	19/7s
Harrisburg, Pa.	39/27sf	33/26w
Hartford, Conn.	39/24s	31/23w
Indianapolis	28/15sf	24/19s
Jackson, Miss.	61/34s	58/51c
Jacksonville, Fla.	64/37s	59/34s
Jefferson City, Mo.	37/21s	33/26c
Kansas City	31/21s	27/18sn
Key West, Fla.	75/63h	71/65pc
Knoxville, Tenn.	45/22sf	37/27pc
Lincoln, Neb.	28/17pc	22/15sn
Little Rock, Ark.	52/32pc	48/43pc
Louisville, Ky.	38/21sf	32/24pc
Manchester, N.H.	38/23w	29/22pc
Memphis, Tenn.	49/29s	46/42pc
Milwaukee	26/11s	25/13s
Mobile, Ala.	65/38pc	59/53pc
Montgomery, Ala.	61/31s	57/43s
Myrtle Beach, S.C.	55/30s	46/29s
Nags Head, N.C.	47/30pc	39/27w
Nashville, Tenn.	44/24s	40/31c
Newark, N.J.	41/28pc	37/26c
Norfolk, Va.	50/28c	38/25s
Oakland, Calif.	58/43r	59/43pc
Oklahoma City	52/38s	52/23c
Omaha, Neb.	25/14pc	21/11sn
Palm Springs, Calif.	78/49pc	74/50pc
Pittsburgh	32/19sn	24/16c
Portland, Maine	34/20w	25/15s
Portland, Ore.	50/46r	49/47sh
Providence, R.I.	38/25s	33/24s
Raleigh, N.C.	52/25pc	42/25s
Rapid City, S.D.	17/9c	12/-1sn
Reno, Nev.	54/28sh	47/28pc
Richmond, Va.	47/24pc	38/21s
Rochester, N.Y.	31/21sf	27/21sf
Sacramento, Calif.	56/39r	55/42pc
San Antonio	69/59c	75/62pc
San Jose, Calif.	61/42r	59/43pc
Savannah, Ga.	61/35s	54/34s
Shreveport, La.	65/44pc	56/53c
Sioux Falls, S.D.	21/6c	16/0c
South Bend, Ind.	27/18sf	23/18pc
Spokane, Wash.	36/32sn	38/34c
Springfield, Mo.	40/25pc	39/33r
Springfield, Ill.	30/14s	27/18c
St. Louis	38/21s	31/23c
Syracuse, N.Y.	32/23sf	24/22sn
Tallahassee, Fla.	66/35s	60/39s
Tampa, Fla.	68/48s	65/47s
Topeka, Kan.	35/22pc	29/21sn
Tucson, Ariz.	85/47c	76/41s
Tulsa, Okla.	47/33pc	50/37r
Wichita, Kan.	43/29pc	34/23i
Wilmington, Del.	40/25sf	36/23w
Winston-Salem, N.C.	51/24pc	39/25s

pc Partly cloudy **s** Sunny **sh** Showers **c** Cloudy **t** Thunderstorms **w** Windy **dr** Drizzle **h** Haze **f** Fog **i** Ice **r** Rain **sf** Snowflurries **sn** Snow

EXTREMES

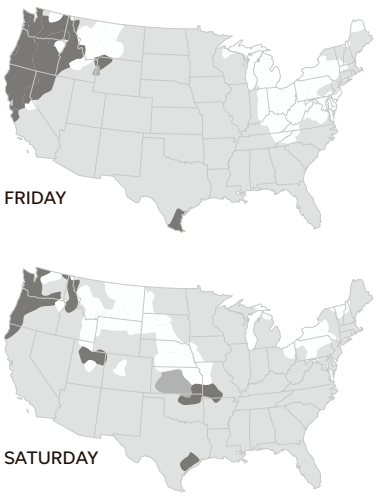
Note: For contiguous 48 states through 3 p.m. Thursday

HOTTEST: 79° Tamiami, Fla.

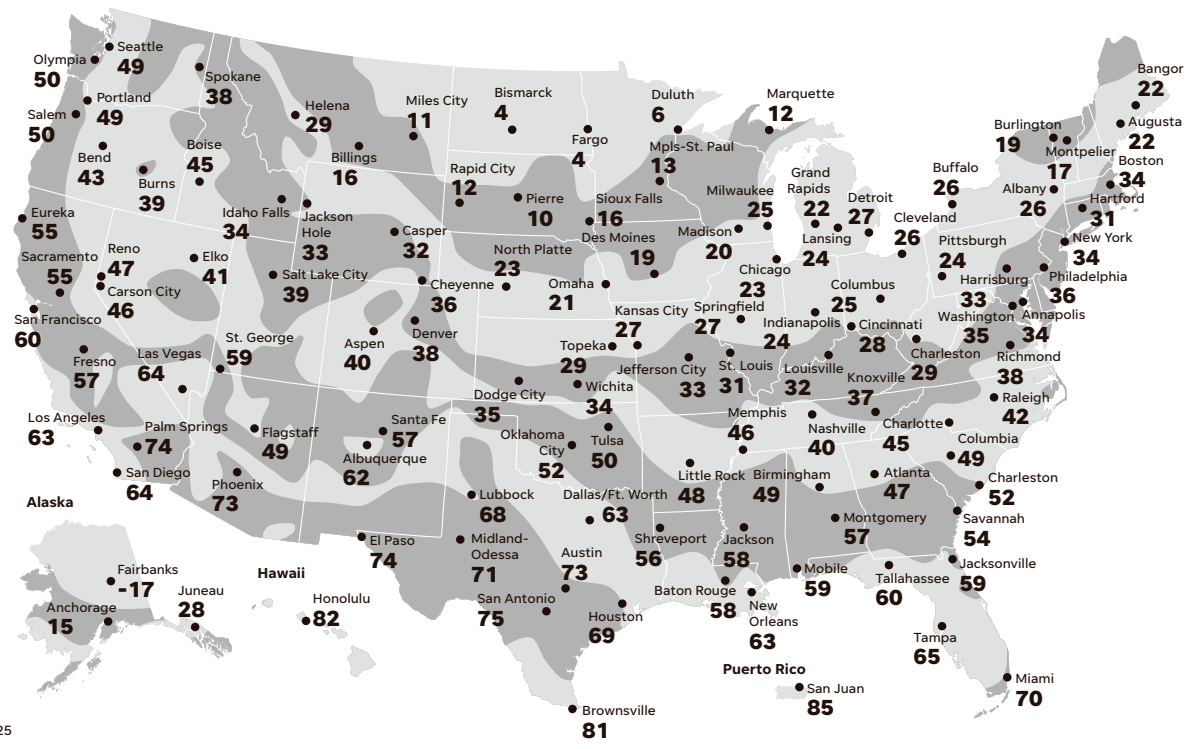
COLDEST: -11° Stanley, N.D.

PRECIPITATION FORECAST

T-storms Rain Snow Ice/mix



SATURDAY'S HIGH TEMPERATURES



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NFL POWER RANKINGS

Several worthy No. 1 options ahead of Week 18

Nate Davis
USA TODAY

NFL power rankings entering Week 18 (previous rank in parentheses):

1. Buffalo Bills (1): It would be a cop-out to cluster a half-dozen teams as tied for first place here, though certainly not difficult to make a case that that many clubs – at minimum – should be viewed as bona fide Super Bowl contenders. But the Bills have had a special season, winning all of their home games for the first time in 34 years, establishing club records for total touchdowns (63) and points (509), all while being led by the possible league MVP in QB Josh Allen.

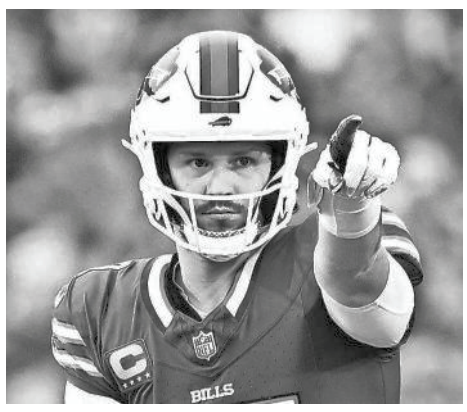
2. Kansas City Chiefs (3): Sure, the style points have largely been lacking. Yet they could join the 2007 Patriots as the only teams to win 16 regular-season games. That aside, does anyone doubt that a core that's won three titles in the past five seasons can elevate its performance in January? As such, could this be the year we finally see a historic three-peat Lombardi breakthrough?

3. Detroit Lions (2): Despite all the injuries, they're on the verge of the first No. 1 playoff seed in team history. And regardless of the defensive health, this group is capable of beating anyone in a shootout – and most definitely so at Ford Field, though it's also incumbent to note that the Lions are the first team to go undefeated on the road in four years.

4. Minnesota Vikings (5): Give this team the respect that it's due. Give QB Sam Darnold the respect that he's due. Recognize their more than reasonable chance to pull that No. 1 seed out from under the Lions at the eleventh hour and what a tough venue U.S. Bank Stadium has become.

5. Philadelphia Eagles (6): As QB Jalen Hurts continues navigating the concussion protocol for the newly crowned NFC East champs, discretion was the better part of valor when it came to sitting 2,000-yard rusher Saquon Barkley, who was 101 yards shy of the league's single-season rushing record, to keep him healthy for the playoffs.

6. Baltimore Ravens (7): QB Lamar Jackson and RB Derrick Henry deservedly command the lions' share of this club's attention. But the Ravens really seem to have turned the corner over the last six games thanks to a stabilized defense, which is permitting an average of 16.3 points and 267 yards over that stretch.


The Bills and quarterback Josh Allen have defeated the Chiefs and Lions this season. MARK KONEZNY/IMAGN IMAGES

7. Green Bay Packers (4): Did you know – they could be the first 12-win team relegated to a seventh seed in postseason history? That could be reality for the Pack, though there is some question about how dangerous they actually are given they only have two wins against teams that are going to the playoffs this season.

8. Los Angeles Rams (9): Did you know – they're the first team to win a division courtesy of the strength-of-victory tiebreaker? Gonna need more, uh, strong victories in the coming weeks.

9. Tampa Bay Buccaneers (11): Did you know – they've scored at least 40 points on three occasions this season, including twice in the past three weeks?

10. Washington Commanders (10): Of all of rookie Jayden Daniels' insane numbers, consider this – he has five TD passes in the final 30 seconds or overtime of a game this season, which is two better than any other quarterback since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger.

11. Los Angeles Chargers (12): Justin Herbert has joined Peyton Manning and Russell Wilson as the only quarterbacks to throw for at least 3,000 yards and 20 TDs in each of their first five seasons.

12. Pittsburgh Steelers (8): Wilson, now 36, better find that younger form soon given how much his current team has struggled to score or move the ball through the air during a three-game losing streak.

13. Cincinnati Bengals (14): He almost certainly won't win the MVP award, but that doesn't mean that QB Joe Burrow hasn't been the league's most spectacular player in 2024.

14. Seattle Seahawks (16): They fell short of the playoffs, but Mike Macdonald joined Chuck Knox and Mike Holmgren as the only first-year Seattle head coaches with winning records.

15. Denver Broncos (15): They don't have a single player with 1,000 yards from scrimmage – and WR Courtland Sutton is the only one who's even exceeded 800.

16. Houston Texans (13): They may be AFC South champs for the second straight year, but they also look like a very inviting opening-round playoff matchup.

17. Atlanta Falcons (17): You have to wonder how this season might have been different if they'd gone to rookie QB Michael Penix Jr. earlier.

18. Arizona Cardinals (19): If TE Trey McBride notches his fourth 12-catch game of the season in Week 18, he will set the century-plus-old franchise's mark for receptions in one campaign with 116.

19. Miami Dolphins (21): Be nice to have QB Tua Tagovailoa (hip) back Sunday, but the Dolphins are 12-2 in their past 14 games against the Jets with a variety of passers.

20. San Francisco 49ers (22): Drink this in – over the past 22 seasons, they've either advanced as far as the NFC championship game or (like this year) have missed the playoffs entirely.

21. Dallas Cowboys (18): They've been generally average rushing the ball during head coach Mike McCarthy's tenure, yet Rico Dowdle is their third different 1,000-yard back in the past four seasons.

22. Indianapolis Colts (20): A team not known for its passing prowess has managed to produce a trio of 700-yard receivers (Alec Pierce, Michael Pittman Jr. and Josh Downs).

23. Chicago Bears (25): This is a record-setting squad, y'all. It's the first team in NFL history to allow the first score in a game 15 times.

24. Carolina Panthers (23): While there's reason for optimism, there's also a lot of work to do here. Per Next Gen Stats, Bryce Young was pressured on 69% of his 24 dropbacks in Sunday's loss, the highest pressure rate any quarterback has faced this season.

25. New England Patriots (24): They're currently projected to pick first in the 2025 draft – a valuable commodity in any year, but especially so when you already seem to have a young franchise quarterback (Drake Maye) in the building.

26. Las Vegas Raiders (27): You have to admire the grit they've shown, especially late in the season, even if it might once again push them out of range of getting a first-round quarterback.

27. New York Jets (26): Garrett Wilson is the first player in franchise history to begin his career with three consecutive 1,000-yard receiving seasons.

28. Jacksonville Jaguars (30): Rookie WR Brian Thomas Jr. has been the silver lining to an otherwise dark season. His 1,227 yards from scrimmage are 449 more than anyone else on the team, and Thomas owns one-third of Jags' 30 offensive TDs, which rank near the bottom of the league.

29. New York Giants (32): WR Malik Nabers and RB Tyrone Tracy Jr. are the first rookie tandem on a single team to both clear 1,000 yards from scrimmage in 18 years.

30. New Orleans Saints (28): When rookie QB Spencer Rattler leads you in rushing yards in successive weeks ... well, the outcomes were basically inevitable.

31. Cleveland Browns (29): They quietly restructured QB Deshaun Watson's contract ... which should create badly needed roster flexibility, even if Watson is virtually assured of sticking around for another season.

32. Tennessee Titans (31): Coach Brian Callahan, please sum up this season: "There's no joy in this process. There's no fun in this. It's terrible. I feel it every day I walk into work."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL WEEKEND BOWL GAMES

First Responder Bowl in Dallas

North Texas (6-6)
vs. Texas State (7-5)
Friday, 4 p.m. ET, ESPN

Friday's doubleheader kicks off with this Lone Star State Group of Five showdown. North Texas will be without several outgoing transfers, most notably starting QB Chandler Morris and leading WR DT Sheffield. Drew Mestemaker will make his starting debut at QB for the Mean Green, and he'll likely make extensive use of his most experienced WR Damon Ward. The Bobcats have some departures as well, but QB Jordan McCloud is still around. His primary targets are WRs Joey Hobert and Jaden Williams.

Duke's Mayo Bowl in Charlotte

Minnesota (7-5)
vs. Virginia Tech (6-6)
Friday, 7:30 p.m. ET, ESPN

The power conferences take the field again for the Friday nightcap that will culminate in an extremely messy postgame ritual. The Hokies will have the last chance to salvage what has been a largely disappointing postseason for the ACC, but the Golden Gophers arrive in better health. Minnesota's playmaking trio of QB Max Brosmer, WR Daniel Jackson and RB Darius Taylor should all be on hand. Virginia Tech QB Kyron Drones was limited down the stretch with a variety of injuries and is unlikely to play. The good news is backup William "Pop" Watson is returning to the Hokies next season, and he saw considerable action late including the season-ending victory against Virginia.

Bahamas Bowl in Nassau

Buffalo (8-4) vs. Liberty (8-3)
Saturday, 11 a.m. ET, ESPN2

The non-playoff portion of the bowl season wraps up in the Caribbean, a more than desirable destination if you're coming from Buffalo. The Flames should be happy to be here as well, though it might be something of a letdown after last year's season concluded in the Fiesta Bowl. The Bulls should be near full strength coming in, with QB C.J. Ogbonna and RB Al-Jay Henderson set to lead the offense. Liberty said goodbye to outbound transfer QB Kaidon Salter, so Ryan Burger will get the start.

– Eddie Timanus, USA TODAY

Mount Union looks to change luck against North Central

Steve Doerschuk
The Canton (Ohio) Repository
USA TODAY NETWORK

In two seasons at Mount Union, TJ DeShields has thrown eight TD passes and four interceptions. JULIE VENNITTI BOTOS/CANTON REPOSITORY

Even for the University of Mount Union, getting to the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl can be hard. Never more so than this year.

Now comes the hardest part: beating the North Central Cardinals. The teams will collide at 8 p.m. ET Sunday in the NCAA Division III National Championship Stagg Bowl at Shell Energy Stadium in Houston. The game will be televised nationally on ESPN.

Mount Union has reached 23 NCAA Division III championship games and has won 13 titles, but this season's team had more close games than usual. North Central is the hottest program in Division III, reaching the title game in 2019 (41-14 rout of Wisconsin-Whitewater), 2021 (57-24 loss to Mary Hardin-Baylor), 2022 (28-21 win over Mount Union) and 2023 (38-37 loss to Cortland). There was no game in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both Mount Union and North Central are 14-0, but the Cardinals have won by monster scores, including 66-0 over Susquehanna in the national semifinals. The Purple Raiders outlasted Johns Hopkins 45-37 in their semifinal.

North Central is based in the Chicago suburb of Naperville, Illinois. Its quarterback, Luke Lehnen, might be the best player in program history.

Mount Union's quarterback, TJ DeShields, is an injury replacement. DeShields is 25 years old and was a senior at West Branch High School all the way back in 2017. He began his college career at Akron.

Now, representing the storied program so close to his home, he has his chance of a lifetime.

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Buckeyes may have cleared one hurdle

Josh Peter
USA TODAY

PASADENA, Calif. – The Ohio State football team may have passed its most important test on the way to a potential national championship.

No, not the Buckeyes' 41-21 victory over top-seeded Oregon on Wednesday at the Rose Bowl in the quarterfinals of the College Football Playoff.

Ohio State's upcoming game against Texas in the semifinals might fail to challenge the eighth-seeded Buckeyes. Ditto for any potential matchup in the national championship game. The biggest test for Ohio State may have come off the field.

"The players have stuck together and they're fighting to stay together," Buckeyes head coach Ryan Day said during a postgame news conference.

About 30 minutes earlier, Day beamed as fireworks exploded and confetti fell. The scene served as an astonishing contrast to what transpired in Columbus, Ohio, on Nov. 30. That day, the Buckeyes lost to the Michigan Wolverines for the fourth year in a row – a 13-10 debacle that ended with Day looking shell-shocked and his players fighting the Wolverines at midfield.

So how did we get here? Day was under fire. So were the players, expected to make about $20 million this season in NIL deals and contributions from the school's collective. Then the Buckeyes responded by beating Tennessee 42-17 in the first round of the playoffs and followed that with the convincing victory over No. 1 Oregon.

"I talked to these guys about it a couple of weeks ago," Day said. "That's life. And this team is resilient. And when you surround yourself with great people, with great character, you find yourself working through difficult times."

Day also said, "We're at a place where you can hear a lot of noise, but they (his players) didn't do that."

"Warriors" is how he referred to his players, and like warriors is how they've played since the dreadful Michigan game.

The Buckeyes racked up 500 yards in total offense against Oregon. It was the same explosive offense that amassed 473 yards against Tennessee. A team that hardly resembled the one that managed just 252 yards against Michigan despite being a 21-point favorite.

Day praised Chip Kelly, Ohio State's high-priced offensive coordinator, who had also been under fire after the loss to Michigan. "Yeah, I thought Chip called a great game," Day said. "I thought the whole offensive staff worked hard to put the plan together."

Ohio State's defense showed championship-caliber ability. The Buckeyes held Oregon to minus-23 yards rushing on 28 carries while sacking Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel eight times.

It was the Buckeyes who faced the possibility of being sacked by their own fan base. How did they avoid it? Ohio State linebacker Cody Simon, a team captain, offered insight when he said, "That's probably the biggest part about football: It's a game about getting your body, mind and spirit right."

There's also the issue of trust, as quarterback Will Howard connected with star freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith for seven receptions, 187 yards and two TDs.

"Will does a great job in practice just trusting us, just throwing the ball out there," Smith said. "We tell him, just throw it out there. We'll make a play for you. It don't matter if it's a bad ball or not, we'll make our quarterback look good."

The Buckeyes are looking good, all right.

"Obviously," Oregon coach Dan Lanning said, "that's a team I think that has the ability to go win it all."

The biggest hurdle may be cleared.

Ohio State's defense changed for rematch

Bill Rabinowitz
The Columbus Dispatch | USA TODAY NETWORK

PASADENA, Calif. – His fiancee at his side, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles beamed as he walked to the Ohio State bus.

Cornerback Denzel Burke, who had a nightmarish game against Oregon in October, held a rose in his hand and wore a smile as big as Knowles'.

Ohio State's 41-21 College Football Playoff quarterfinal victory Wednesday at the Rose Bowl over the No. 1 Ducks was special for all the Buckeyes, but maybe meant the most to these two. Ohio State's defense is the top-ranked one in the country, but that 32-31 loss at Autzen Stadium cut deep.

"It bothered me for the players," Knowles said. "They've been really good all year, (actually) great. They had one game where they had some bad plays. It was tough on me. You feel like a parent who sees people get down on them.

"I'm just so happy for them that they were able to come back and have a dominating effort."

Oregon has both of the highest scoring outings against Ohio State this season, but its 21 points Wednesday came after Ohio State had built a 34-0 lead. At that point the Buckeyes had allowed only 64 yards on six Oregon possessions.

Ohio State swarmed Oregon's running game. The Ducks averaged just 1.7 yards on their 20 carries. Jordan James, who gained 115 yards in the first meeting, was knocked out of the game after managing only 14 yards on seven carries.

Quarterback Dillon Gabriel, who finished third in the 2024 Heisman Trophy voting and had torched the Buckeyes in the game at Autzen Stadium, was sacked eight times. Several of the 5-foot-11 quarterback's passes were batted down.

"We presented different looks," Knowles said, "and that's what made the quarterback hold the ball. And we shut down the run early, and that (made them one-dimensional), and that helped us."

An explosive offense all season, Oregon didn't have a play longer than 12 yards until connecting on a 44-yarder to set up its first touchdown at the end of the first half.

When the Ducks opened the third quarter with another touchdown drive, it looked like the second half might not be a formality, after all.

But the Buckeyes would have none of it. Defensive end Jack Sawyer and linebacker Cody Simon had sacks to force a three-and-out on Oregon's next possession. When the offense scored, the game was essentially over.

Sawyer, fellow defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau and Simon each had two sacks. Simon had 11 tackles and was named the game's outstanding defensive player.

"One of the biggest things we changed (from the first Oregon game) was our attitude and mentality," Simon said. "There were plays in the game when we weren't aligned or ready to go. With an offense like that for Oregon, they thrive on that stuff.

"For us, it was just that mentality we had to change. We went through a lot of tough conversations after that game and a lot of changes we had to make, but I think we're better for it now."

The pressure on Gabriel was so constant that he didn't have much chance to throw it downfield.

Burke was targeted only once, and he had that deep ball well defended. If it hadn't been overthrown for an incompletion, he said he would have intercepted it.

Burke said this week that it took him a while to get over that October game. He and his teammates got their redemption in a game that mattered more.

"It's a blessing, a blessing in disguise," he said. "Everything happened how it's supposed to happen."

No. 1 Oregon demolished: 'It wasn't our day today'

Jordan Mendoza
USA TODAY

PASADENA, Calif. – For the majority of the regular season, Oregon looked like the best college football team in the country.

They took a few games to figure it out, but once the Ducks clicked they were a scary sight. With an explosive offense capable of scoring at will, it looked like they were destined to win their first national championship and finally solidify themselves as a football powerhouse.

Even after Ohio State routed Tennessee for the right to play Oregon in the Rose Bowl, the feeling on both sides was far from similar: Oregon had bulldozed its way through the Big Ten in its first season in the conference; Ohio State fans largely hadn't gotten over the loss to Michigan. If the Buckeyes were to slip up again, the "lunatic fringe" – as Kirk Herbstreit described the most fanatic Ohio State fans – was ready to axe coach Ryan Day before the clock hit zero.

So as a stealth bomber flew across the Pasadena sky with kickoff moments away, the green side of the stadium was feeling optimistic about its first playoff appearance in a decade while the scarlet and gray side readied its pitchforks again.

But on New Year's Day, it was the Ducks that laid an egg.

Oregon couldn't replicate any of its magic and was soundly beaten by the Buckeyes, ending a dream season in the College Football Playoff quarterfinals.

It didn't really make sense. Oregon was coming off a Big Ten championship game where it put up 45 points against a good Penn State defense. It was facing an Ohio State team it was able to attack in a thrilling win more than two months ago. Instead, the Rose Bowl Game was over before halftime.

What happened?

Ohio State defensive end JT Tuimoloau hits Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel during the second half. ADAM CAIRNS/THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH/USA TODAY NETWORK

"Sometimes it's not your day. I think that was today. It wasn't our day today," said coach Dan Lanning.

One quarter was all Ohio State *really* needed to prove it was better than Oregon. The Buckeyes were already up 7-0 after the first minute and the Ducks had back-to-back three-and-outs to start. By the end of the first 15 minutes, it was a 14-0 Ohio State lead and the Buckeyes were finding every big-play opportunity while Oregon couldn't move the ball.

When it reached 34-0 by the second quarter, there wasn't going to be anything Oregon could do to come back.

"We really didn't have the ability to stop them, and we didn't have the ability to get something going for us on offense," Lanning said. "We just ran into a great team and we didn't play our best."

What killed Oregon were the big plays. Ohio State's first four touchdowns were all at least 40-yard scores, absolutely crushing the spirit of a defense that ranked in the top 15 in several statistical categories. Ohio State receiver Jeremiah Smith was producing highlight after highlight and quarterback Will Howard was deceiving the defense to find guys open.

Lanning, the third-year Ducks coach, took the blame for the loss. He said the coaches didn't have a good enough plan, and when things started to go south, adjustments weren't made fast enough to stabilize the team. The Buckeyes did a good job getting their receivers in favorable one-on-one matchups, leading to big gains.

"They did a good job taking shots early on," said senior linebacker Jeffrey Bassa. "They were just firing on all cylinders. Credit to them."

Concern with new, expanded College Football Playoff format?

Several of college football's stakeholders are keeping their eyes on how the inaugural 12-team College Football Playoff unfolds. It's safe to say there will likely be some changes to it in the near future.

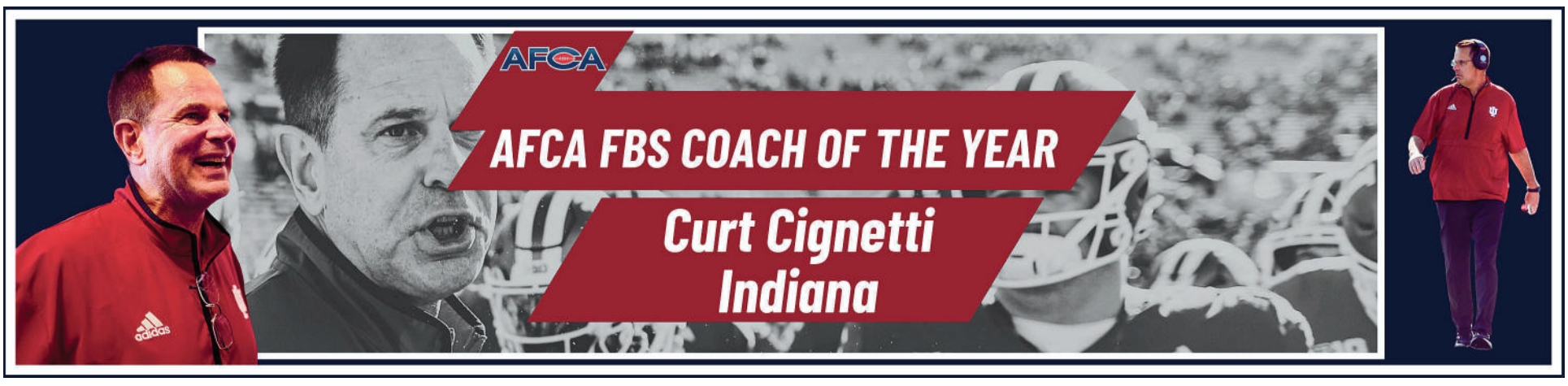
Through three quarterfinal games, it's the three teams that had to play a first-round game that moved on to the semifinals, while the three teams that got an opening-round bye are one and done. Did the long layoff hurt the conference champions that had to face teams with momentum?

"I think that's an excuse," Lanning said. "I thought our guys prepared well going in. Obviously they had a better plan than us, but that's an excuse."

Almost immediately after the bracket was revealed, it was obvious the Ducks were not really rewarded for having a perfect regular season. They were going to get a tough opponent in the quarterfinals while other teams like Penn State were seen as getting an easier path for a title run.

But Lanning isn't angry about the situation. He said his team would've had to face great teams regardless of the round it did it in.

"We had an opportunity. We didn't take advantage of the opportunity. I'm not going to make excuses for our opportunity," Lanning said. "No complaints for us for having that opportunity. (Ohio State) took advantage of it and we didn't."



USA TODAY WEEKEND EXTRA

FRIDAY, JANUARY 3, 2025 | **SECTION D**

Remembering President Jimmy Carter

Former President Jimmy Carter, seen in 2014, often called his work with The Carter Center his proudest achievement. ROBERT DEUTSCH/USA TODAY

History will shine light on an enduring legacy

Carter leaves a strong, ethical America and a more peaceful world

Stuart E. Eizenstat Opinion contributor

Jimmy Carter was a presidential paradox – a son of the Deep South devoted to civil rights, a small businessman wary of his party's labor union base, a devout Baptist abhorred by the rising religious right, a submarine officer who was reluctant to commit American forces in war and a ferocious campaigner who disdained the compromises of governing. He parked politics at the Oval Office door, believing he would be reelected if he did "the right thing," freeing him to take on challenges other presidents shirked.

Congress enacted 70% of his ambitious agenda, a record surpassed only slightly by the fabled President Lyndon Johnson. Carter, who died Sunday at age 100 at his home in Plains, Georgia, was our most accomplished one-term modern president, whose enduring achievements were eclipsed by inflation, Iran, inexperience and interparty warfare.

The energy security America enjoys rests on the foundation of his three comprehensive energy bills, ending price controls on domestic production of oil and natural gas, focusing on conservation, and inaugurating the era of wind and solar energy.

Average Americans benefited from the consumer advocates he placed in regulatory agencies, along with legislation that opened up transportation to competition, from trucking to railroads to airlines, making air travel affordable and clearing the way for carriers like Southwest Airlines and JetBlue Airways.

He even removed Prohibition-era regulations that had blocked the rise of the local craft beer industry and began telecommunications deregulation that ushered in the cable era.

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INSIDE

Building homes, changing lives

How Carter became the face of Habitat for Humanity. **3D**

Carter's faith, in and out of White House

His brand of progressive evangelicalism drew allies and enemies. **4D**

Looking back on 100 years

Timeline of events in life and career of an American statesman. **6D**

Reflections of longest-living president embraced importance of wife, work

'I've had a wonderful life,' he said in 2015 when time seemed to be growing short

Marina Pitofsky
USA TODAY

Former President Jimmy Carter left a legacy as a leader and humanitarian.

At 100, Carter was the longest-living commander in chief in American history. He died Sunday in his hometown of Plains, Georgia.

Carter told reporters in 2015 that he had thought he had only a few weeks to live when his doctors discovered cancer had spread to parts of his brain.

"It's in the hands of God, whom I worship, and I'll be prepared for anything that comes," Carter said at the time. "I'm ready for anything and looking forward to a new adventure.

"I've had a wonderful life," Carter said. "I've had thousands of friends."

Here's a look at Carter's reflections on his long life, from his family to his presidency and decades of philanthropic work.

One of his secrets to long life: Marrying the right woman

Carter told People in 2019 that "it's hard to live until you're 95 years old," his age at the time. But he shared his secret: marrying his wife of over seven decades, Rosalynn Carter.

"I think the best explanation for that is to marry the best spouse: someone who will take care of you and engage and do things to challenge you and keep you alive and interested in life."

Rosalynn Carter died in November 2023 at 96. Jimmy Carter said in a statement at the time that "Rosalynn was my equal partner in everything I ever accomplished."

"She gave me wise guidance and encouragement when I needed it," he said. "As long as Rosalynn was in the world, I always knew somebody loved and supported me."

Carter, in the same 2019 interview with People, added that in their later years, he and Rosalynn Carter savored breaks from public life.

"Now when we have a quiet moment, like a birthday or something, we like to stay at home, just by ourselves, and enjoy a quiet day in our own house without any visitors and with minimum phone calls and emails coming in."

In his 2015 book, "A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety," the former president said his 90th birthday created "a good time to look back on moments that changed my life," including his presidency; founding his human rights organization, The Carter Center; and his other achievements.

> **"Teaching, writing, and helping The Carter Center evolve during more recent times seem to constitute the high points in my life."**
>
> **Former President Jimmy Carter**
> In his book "A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety"

On his time as president of the United States: 'I did my best'

The former president wrote in the book that he remembers his term as president, from 1977 to 1981, "with peace and satisfaction, knowing that I did my best and had some notable accomplishments."

"Vice President Mondale summarized our administration by saying, 'We told the truth, we obeyed the law, we kept the peace.' I would add, 'We championed human rights,'" Carter wrote.

But he also noted in the book that "I spent four of my 90 years in the White House, and they were, of course, the pinnacle of my political life. Those years, though, do not dominate my chain of memories.

"Teaching, writing, and helping The Carter Center evolve during more recent times seem to constitute the high points in my life."

Pride in philanthropy, human rights work he and wife did

Carter has long pointed to his work with The Carter Center as one of his proudest achievements. Carter joked in an interview with The Washington Post in 2013 that "I know I am running out of time," but he touted his and his wife's work at the nonprofit.

"I am 88 years old, but I am not hampered by it," Carter said. "Rosalynn and I are doing everything to make sure Carter Center continues when I am not here."

Carter's work with The Carter Center is one of his many philanthropic achievements. Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 "for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development," the Nobel Prize website says.

The former president spent years helping build homes with Habitat for Humanity, including a journey to Nashville in 2019 to help with projects even after falling at home and receiving 14 stitches.

Eizenstat

Continued from Page 1D

A clean-energy pioneer

Carter was the greatest environmental president since Theodore Roosevelt, doubling the size of the national park system through the Alaska Lands Act. With typical attention to detail, he spread a map of Alaska on the Oval Office rug and on his hands and knees persuaded Alaska's senior Republican senator to accept setting aside over 157 million acres for protection against development.

In ethically challenged Washington, Carter's campaign pledges – "I will never lie to you" and seeking a government "as good" as the American people – were translated into lasting reforms: the 1977 Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, prohibiting companies from paying bribes to foreign officials to get business; the 1978 Inspector General Act, creating independent inspectors general to root out fraud and abuse in federal agencies; and the 1978 Ethics in Government Act, requiring senior officials to disclose their assets, restrict gifts and limit post-employment lobbying, and authorizing the appointment of special prosecutors to investigate wrongdoing – the precursor to special counsel Robert Mueller and his Russia investigation during the Trump presidency.

With Walter Mondale, Carter created the modern vice presidency, making his running mate a full partner in government with a West Wing office and access to all classified papers. He appointed more women and minorities to judgeships and senior posts than all the previous 38 presidents together, and he supported affirmative action, angering his conservative Southern base.

Carter's domestic Achilles' heel was also his finest hour: tackling a decade of runaway inflation impervious to traditional remedies. Inflation was high during the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford presidencies and rose further under Carter with the oil shock and gas lines from the radical Iranian revolution.

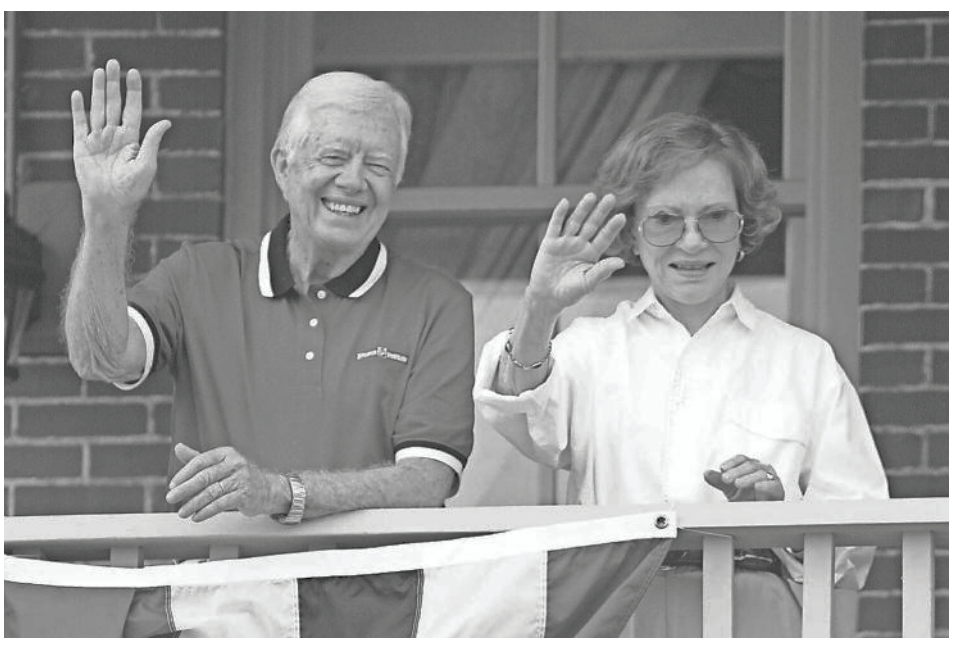
He told us that every measure he tried had failed, and that even if it doomed his reelection he would choose Paul Volcker to chair the Federal Reserve, knowing full well it would mean tight money and sky-high interest rates that his advisers, including me, warned would be political poison.

Carter never complained. Volcker's prescription worked – not in time to earn him a second term, but it laid the foundation for the low inflation we enjoy today, even with the temporary spike from the pandemic recovery.

Stronger America at home, abroad

In foreign policy, Carter's most lasting success was the greatest feat of personal presidential diplomacy in American history. Deliberately isolated at Camp David for 13 agonizing days in September 1978 with the mutually distrustful Menachem Begin of Israel and Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Carter crafted more than 20 successive draft agreements seeking common ground.

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, left, President Jimmy Carter and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin sign a Middle East agreement at the White House in 1978 after a Camp David summit that September. PROVIDED BY THE JIMMY CARTER LIBRARY



Carter and former first lady Rosalynn Carter greet the crowds at the Peanut Festival parade in Plains, Ga., in 2002. H. DARR BEISER/USA TODAY

With all participants exhausted, Begin was ready to go home. Carter applied a personal touch by inscribing photographs of the three leaders to Begin's eight grandchildren. The Israeli prime minister's eyes teared, he relented and the rest is history: For more than four decades, the peace treaty Carter negotiated between Egypt and Israel has been central to Israel's security and to America's national interest.

Carter made human rights a central tenet and applied those principles to the Latin American dictatorships, creating a new era in hemispheric relations along with the Panama Canal Treaty.

With the Soviet Union, he combined soft and hard power: championing human rights for Soviet Jews and others, increasing defense spending, greenlighting military modernization (which President Ronald Reagan later built upon); and taking a tough stand on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

> **Jimmy Carter does not deserve a place on Mount Rushmore with our greatest presidents, but he belongs in the foothills with others who strengthened our country and its place in the world.**

It was confrontation with the Iranian revolution, a conundrum no president has resolved, that brought down Carter. He supported our ally, the shah of Iran, to the bitter end, and urged the shah's army to stand up to the Islamic regime that followed. Carter was the last holdout, and after he agreed to let the shah enter the United States for cancer treatment, radical students took American diplomats hostage in our Tehran embassy.

Carter mistakenly promised their families he would put their safety first, giving the Iranians leverage, and refused to blockade Iran's oil export ports. He holed himself up in the White House to concentrate on their release, keeping the humiliating story on television for 444 nights.

The crowning blow was a bold but unsuccessful rescue mission doomed by too few helicopters, unexpected sandstorms, and the failure of our four military services to coordinate the complex mission. But as commander in chief, he took sole responsibility.

David Jones, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, recounted to me in an interview for my book what Carter had told him: If the mission succeeded, it would be their success; if it failed, it would be on his shoulders.

Carter's enemies dismissed him as ineffectual, and former President Donald Trump called his accomplishments "peanuts," but they were wrong.

Jimmy Carter does not deserve a place on Mount Rushmore with our greatest presidents, but he belongs in the foothills with others who strengthened our country and its place in the world.

His vice president, Walter Mondale, put it succinctly in words now etched on the Carter Presidential Library: "We told the truth, we obeyed the law, we kept the peace."

Stuart E. Eizenstat was chief White House domestic policy adviser to President Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1981 and held several senior positions in the Clinton administration from 1993 to 2001, including U.S. ambassador to the European Union, undersecretary of commerce, undersecretary of state and deputy secretary of the treasury. He is the author of "President Carter: The White House Years."

Former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, attach siding to the front of a Habitat for Humanity home being built on June 10, 2003, in LaGrange, Ga. ERIK S. LESSER/GETTY IMAGES

Carter hammered way into Habitat for Humanity's heart

Former president, wife were unofficial face of charity

Marco della Cava USA TODAY

Jimmy Carter was many contrasting things in his impossibly productive century on the planet. ● President and peanut farmer. Naval submariner and softball aficionado. Sunday school teacher and pal of hard-partying Willie Nelson. ● But one diehard pursuit holds no inherent contradiction: Carter's decades-long dedication to Habitat for Humanity, the Georgia-based homebuilding charity for which he (and his wife, Rosalynn) arguably became the unofficial face.

When Carter, who died Sunday at age 100, first showed up alongside other Habitat volunteers at a decrepit tenement on New York's Lower East Side in 1984, the cultural zeitgeist did a double take. What was a man just four years removed from the White House doing here, hammer in hand and sweat on his brow?

"That image of a former president of the United States sleeping in a church basement by night and doing carpentry by day captured the imagination," Jonathan Reckford, CEO of Habitat since 2005, told USA TODAY a few years before Carter's death. "It redefined what a post-presidency and servant leadership meant."

It also created a bit of a headache for Reckford. "One of the persistent myths at this point is that President Carter started and runs Habitat," he says with a chuckle. "No question, though, he put us on the map."

Carter placed a premium on doing

For many Americans, the Carters indeed became synonymous with the organization, thanks in part to media interest in a former world leader putting his muscle where his mouth was.

Carter seemed to relish such physical labor, always providing that trademark toothy grin mixed with endearing "aw-shucks" charm. But those who came to know Carter's Habitat for Humanity construction marathons say the truth is he was a driven man in all areas of his life and considered this work as meriting the same dedication, skill and expediency as affairs of state.

Each year, the couple would set aside one week to join other volunteers. The modest homes they built were for those who desperately needed shelter and could contribute to rent but did not qualify for traditional mortgages. Beneficiaries also committed to partnering with the group to help build homes, sometimes their own.

With that gesture, Carter put a spotlight on the notion that good deeds were not simply for when time allowed. Acts of charity, rather, required a dedicated time commitment.

Carter helped build a Habitat for Humanity home in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City on Sept. 12, 2000. SPENCER PLATT/ GETTY IMAGES

"That image of a former president of the United States sleeping in a church basement by night and doing carpentry by day captured the imagination."

Jonathan Reckford
CEO of Habitat for Humanity

Habitat was founded in 1976 by Georgians Millard and Linda Fuller as a Christian organization – the couple were dismissed by the board in 2005 after charges of inappropriate behavior were leveled at Millard Fuller, who died in 2009 – but gathered significant momentum after Carter put on a hardhat in the '80s. The organization has helped more than 59 million people "build or improve the place they call home."

For decades, in good weather and bad, the Carters never missed a build week – better known as The Carter Work Project – personally working alongside more than 108,000 volunteers in 14 countries to renovate and repair 4,400-plus homes, according to Habitat.

From the Mekong Delta to the Gulf Coast, from Maine to Mississippi, wherever the Carters went, statesmen and celebrities were quick to appear. But Carter would politely brush them off and pick up his hammer, citing a tight work timeline.

In 2018, Carter and his wife, then 93 and 90, rolled up the sleeves of their work shirts and helped a few fortunate souls in Mishawaka and South Bend, Indiana, put a roof over their heads. It was their 35th Carter Work Project. Only COVID-19 stopped them.

Why Habitat for Humanity? The country is awash in organizations that provide relief for those in need. For Carter, those connected to him say, it had to do with his deep Christian faith.

But there were other reasons as well, ranging from an opportunity to act on his passion for woodworking and the altruistic influence of Carter's mother, Lillian, a nurse who often could be found helping

See HABITAT, Page 5D

In his own words: Quotes on peace, democracy, rights

On war and peace

"War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children."

– Nobel lecture on Dec. 10, 2002, after winning the Nobel Peace Prize

On government watchdogs

"Thoughtful criticism and close scrutiny of all government officials by the press and the public are an important part of our democratic society."

– Presidential farewell address on Jan. 14, 1981

Peacemaker, not policeman

"We have no desire to be the world's policeman. But America does want to be the world's peacemaker."

– 1979 State of the Union address

On marijuana decriminalization

"Penalties against possession of a drug should not be more damaging to an individual than the use of the drug itself; and where they are, they should be changed. Nowhere is this more clear than in the laws against possession of marijuana in private for personal use. We can, and should, continue to discourage the use of marijuana, but this can be done without defining the smoker as a criminal."

– 1977 message to Congress about drug abuse

On Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo

"Since 2001, the U.S. government has abandoned its role as a champion of human rights and has perpetrated terrible and illegal abuses in prisons in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, sent prisoners secretly to other nations to be tortured, denied the applicability of the Geneva Convention restraints, and severely restricted time-honored civil liberties within our own country. Certain political leaders of other nations, who are inclined to perpetrate human rights abuses to quiet dissenting voices and were previously restrained by positive influence from Washington, now feel free to emulate or exceed the abuses approved by American leaders."

– 2007 book, "Beyond the White House: Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope"

On human rights

"I realize that violence is not more prevalent today than in previous periods of human history, but there is a difference. We have seen visionary standards adopted by the global community that espouse peace and human rights, and the globalization of information ensures that the violation of these principles of nonviolence by a powerful and admired democracy tends to resonate throughout the world community. We should have advanced much further in the realization of women's rights, given these international commitments to peace and the rule of law."

– 2014 book, "A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power"

On children and gun violence

"Every day in the United States, seventeen children are killed by gunfire. That's about 6,000 children each year who are killed by guns, as compared, for example, with about 3,000 a year who died at the height of the polio epidemic of the 1950s. We rose up as a society to fight against polio. Why do we not act more forcefully to halt today's even greater scourge?"

– 1997 book, "Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith"

On drugs and the justice system

"I don't think there's any doubt that the drug culture has shaped at least one major change, and that is the treatment of prisoners. When I was governor, I competed with other progressive Southern governors in who could reduce our prison population the most. ... But now, with the increase of the drug culture, politicians brag about how many prisons they've built. ... The punishment for drug use has become the pre-eminent basis for overloading our courts and prisons."

– 2007 Rolling Stone interview

Compiled by Sarah Elbeshbishi

Our remaining living presidents have thrived

Jordan Mendoza
USA TODAY

The United States lost one of its former commanders in chief Sunday with the death of Jimmy Carter.

Since losing the White House to Ronald Reagan in 1980, Carter has seen seven other men hold the country's highest office. He was there for each incoming president's inauguration, except for Joe Biden's in 2021, which he missed because of health concerns and the coronavirus pandemic.

Carter, who served from 1977 to 1981, was the only president alive who was in office during the 1970s after the death in 2006 of Gerald Ford, and, at age 100, was the oldest living former president.

Now, only four former presidents are alive, and only one was in office during the 20th century. Here are the remaining living presidents and what they have done since leaving the White House:

ALEX WROBLEWSKI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Bill Clinton

The only president from the 20th century, Clinton, 78, was in office from 1993 to 2001. Since then, the 42nd president has been involved in multiple charitable organizations. He also has remained in politics, speaking at every Democratic National Convention since leaving office. He was heavily involved in the 2008 and 2016 presidential campaigns for his wife, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

CLIFF HAWKINS/GETTY IMAGES

George W. Bush

In office from 2001 to 2009, Bush, 78, has lived a quiet life in his home state of Texas. He has established himself as a painter, including publishing a book of portraits of immigrants. He supported his brother, Jeb Bush, in his 2016 presidential campaign and in 2022, was part of a public conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES

Barack Obama

The youngest living former president, 63, Obama criticized President-elect Donald Trump numerous times and endorsed Biden, his former vice president, during Biden's 2020 presidential campaign. He campaigned in several states ahead of the 2022 midterm elections and in the 2024 campaign.

SCOTT EISEN/GETTY IMAGES

Donald Trump

Trump is now the oldest living former president; at 78, he is only 22 days older than Bush. He won the 2024 election and returns to office Jan. 20.

In 2019, Carter questioned Trump's legitimacy as president, saying, "he was put into office because the Russians interfered on his behalf."

Jimmy Carter teaches Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., in 2017. MARK WOODS/USA TODAY NETWORK

Carter's life and work defined by unshakable Christian conviction

But his progressivism drew lines among fellow faithful

Liam Adams and Carla Hinton USA TODAY NETWORK

Jimmy Carter referenced Jesus in an interview with Playboy magazine, and it cost the Democratic presidential nominee more than he could fathom in the moment. ● "I've committed adultery in my heart many times," Carter said, a quote that Playboy published weeks before the 1976 general election.

The article included other remarks related to Carter's faith – such as the importance of the separation of church and state, a conviction born of Carter's Southern Baptist upbringing – but the adultery comment opened a rift with Carter's kin in Christ.

"I am quite disillusioned," the Rev. Jerry Falwell told The Washington Post, according to the book "Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter" by Randall Balmer. Falwell, among other notable preachers, criticized the Playboy interview as an example of voicing impure thoughts.

"Four months ago, the majority of the people I knew were pro-Carter," Falwell told The Post. "Today, that has totally reversed."

That divide only widened after Carter's election that November, and it fueled a fearsome counterattack to the president's progressive evangelicalism, even though the two sides shared certain core beliefs. That opposition, called the religious right, was instrumental in denying Carter a second term.

Carter was one of the most explicitly religious presidents in modern U.S. history. But his rise in politics from Georgia to the White House came during a transformative era in American Christianity. The rise of the religious right limited the influence of progressive evangelicalism in national politics, setting the stage for decades of cultural battles over issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

Still, it didn't deter Carter from pursuing his progressive Christian ideals after he left the White House through teaching, funding initiatives abroad for health care and conflict resolution, and starting a coalition for Black and white Baptists.

Carter died Sunday at age 100, and as the nation reflects on his legacy and specifically that of his religion, the religious movement and countermovement his presidency catalyzed is of equal importance to his lived faith.

Maranatha Baptist Church deacon Zac Steele saw it up close during the many years Carter attended the church in Plains, Georgia, and where he famously taught Sunday school.

"He paid attention to people," Steele said. "If people think it was a theatrical show for many years for him to just use the church as a platform to speak, that is absolutely false."

Carter taught Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist for four decades. He encouraged his students to attend the church service that followed, and he and his wife would stay after church to meet congregants and visitors.
RICHARD BURKHART/ USA TODAY NETWORK

Carter was one of the most explicitly religious presidents in modern U.S. history. But his rise in politics came during a transformative era in American Christianity that set the stage for decades of cultural warfare.

The (progressive) evangelical

The son of a church deacon, Carter was baptized at 11 and taught Sunday school in his later years. He experienced a religious reawakening in 1967 that became the basis for his social and political ethic.

After his 1966 defeat in Georgia's gubernatorial election, Carter came to realize "my relationship with God was a very superficial one," he said, according to "Redeemer."

He went on eye-opening mission trips to Massachusetts and Pennsylvania and continued to study theologians like Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr.

"It was clear that he knew his Bible and he read his Bible very seriously and consistently," said Balmer, author of "Redeemer" and a Dartmouth College historian. "I think that shaped him in many ways personally but also politically throughout his career."

Carter's governorship, following his election in 1970, showed support for prison reform and equal rights for women, and concern about poverty and educational equity, the environment, and the Vietnam War. Though Carter courted segregationists during his gubernatorial campaign, he promoted a message of racial reconciliation in office.

Meanwhile, the same issues animated some evangelical leaders to organize.

Fifty-three Christian leaders signed the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern of 1973. Signatories included burgeoning progressive voices, like Sojourners founder Jim Wallis, and leaders from Carter's own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The 1970s was a high moment in the history of progressive evangelicalism," Balmer said in an interview.

Carter was unaware of the Chicago Declaration at the time, but he professed the same platform when he ran for president in 1976. That, plus his unabashed embrace of the label "born-again Christian," helped him win primary elections in states with large evangelical populations,

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Faith

Continued from Page 4D

according to "Redeemer."

Famously, Time magazine called 1976 "The Year of the Evangelical."

Carter's Playboy interview was a turning point, but not enough to cost him the presidency in November. Once in office, Carter's attendance at Sunday services at First Baptist Church in Washington and at the National Prayer Breakfast impressed Christian leaders who felt the president's faith commitment was authentic.

Some of those Christian leaders, such as the Rev. Billy Graham, also favored Carter for brokering the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel and for participating in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with the Soviet Union.

But Carter's problem-solving abroad was unable to quell evangelical defection at home.

Former President Jimmy Carter leads the congregation in prayer after teaching Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., on Sept. 29, 2002.
H. DARR BEISER/ USA TODAY

Fellow Christians, unwavering foes

The religious right, though an agent that helped deny Carter a second term, began stirring to life before he took office.

It started with a battle over the tax-exempt status of Christian schools that refused admission to Black students, creating evangelical consternation about religious liberty protections, according to Balmer and Anthea Butler, professor of religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

Conservative political strategists like Paul Weyrich tapped into and grew that evangelical fervor with issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, the Equal Rights Amendment and school prayer.

On those issues, Carter "was espousing values that they did not want," said Butler, author of "White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America." "So how could he be the same kind of Christian that they were?"

Like the religious right, Carter personally disagreed with abortion and same-sex marriage. But the two sides were at an impasse when conservatives supported legislation Carter felt infringed on the separation of church and state, such as a proposed constitutional amendment banning abortion and a legislative attempt to restore prayer in public schools.

"He was trying to get them back and he can't get them back," Butler said.

In 1979, Falwell formed the Moral Majority political organization, while Southern Baptist Convention voting delegates elected the first leaders in the "conservative resurgence," a movement that pulled the denomination further to the right. The effects of those inaugural victories started to show almost immediately.

SBC leaders gathered in secret with Graham and other prominent Christians in Dallas in early 1980, where the group prayed and determined it wouldn't back Carter in the upcoming presidential election.

"He wasn't the same kind of culture warrior that they were," Butler said.

Ronald Reagan, however, was and Reagan's eventual alliance with the religious right and its media empire paid off. The Republican nominee received an estimated 56% of the evangelical vote that November.

A 'bad marriage' officially ends

Carter's divide with his Southern Baptist tribe was irreversible by the time he left office.

But it didn't hinder him from practicing his faith where he knew best: a Southern Baptist church.

"I sometimes characterize Carter's relationship with the SBC as a bad marriage," Balmer said. "They've gone through various trials and separations and have tried to reconcile. Then they go again into a separation."

The Carters returned home to Georgia in 1981 and joined Maranatha Baptist, a congregation that splintered off from Plains Baptist Church, where Carter grew up attending, following a vote at Plains Baptist to prohibit Black members.

Carter began teaching weekly a Sunday school class at Maranatha. At one point, he decreased his teaching to once a month. Then, church members asked him to do it more often.

"There was such a demand for it that the church pleaded with him to do it twice a month, to see more visitors," Steele said. "And then, of course, it was good for tourism, too, with a very small town of a population of 800 to 900 people."

Carter encouraged everyone who attended the Sunday school class to attend the church service that followed. Steele said in addition to their sincere interest in Sunday school attendees, both Carters also exhibited patience, staying after church to take pictures with visitors, sometimes for more than an hour.

"Obviously, it's a big tourist attraction," Steele said. "On any given Sunday, we might have in excess of 500 people show up. There's been some days where if you weren't in the parking lot by Saturday, there was a pretty good chance you weren't going to get a seat on Sunday morning for Sunday school."

Steele said Carter used his platform to reach people. He had a genuine interest in participants' spiritual growth and showed it by the way he interacted with them.

"His entire goal in that is to engage you and he always finished up with a challenge to you," Steele said.

Though Carter continued teaching Sunday school at Maranatha for four decades, he stayed with the denomination for about half of that time.

Carter announced in 2000 that he was severing ties with the Southern Baptist Convention, citing exclusionary policies "and an increasingly rigid SBC creed," he said in a letter in 2000.

To Butler, Carter's break with the convention doesn't exhibit forward-thinking but in fact points to Carter's overdue acceptance of the SBC's racial status quo.

"It means the racial politics of the SBC didn't bother him the same way," Butler said. Just five years before his departure did the convention formally apologize for its history of defending slavery.

A new union, near the end

Carter's departure from the convention didn't mean he abandoned Southern Baptists and, in fact, the two crossed paths just a few years later for a momentous gathering of the New Baptist Covenant.

Carter teamed up with Mercer University President Bill Underwood starting in 2006 to bring together Baptists of different races and ethnicities, regions, backgrounds and theological perspectives to form an informal alliance. It was the group's second annual meeting in Atlanta in 2007 that everyone still talks about.

"It was one of the greatest meetings that I've ever attended – remarkable," said the Rev. Mitch Randall, CEO of Good Faith Media. "It was President Carter's lifelong dream to put Baptists together who had been divided."

More than 15,000 people reportedly attended the 2007 event representing 30 Baptist organizations, including historically Black Baptist denominations, moderate Baptist alliances and, perhaps most notably, the SBC.

"You couldn't have had that lineup of people without Carter," said the Rev. Johnny Pierce. "There was a lot of high energy. It was the first time they all got together and said, 'We're going to cross convention lines, affiliation lines.' "

In one of its most significant achievements, the 2007 assembly inspired participants to organize similar gatherings in their respective regions for more local churches to implement the vision of Baptist unity and Christian goodwill.

In subsequent years, New Baptist Covenant regional conferences emerged throughout the country to empower Baptist churches to collaborate on key projects focused on racial reconciliation. For example, churches in Macon, Georgia and Dallas reached across the barrier of racial division to begin conversations aimed at collective healing.

"It inspired these churches to look deep into their past," Randall said, an important acknowledgement of some of the roadblocks that had kept them divided for decades.

The work of New Baptist Covenant stalled in recent years because of the pandemic but also from heightened tension following debate over racial injustice, according to Randall and New Baptist Covenant Executive Director Aidsand Wright-Riggins in an article in Baptist News Global. Around the same time the New Baptist Covenant movement underwent transition, so did its co-founder.

In November 2019, Carter led his last Sunday school class at Maranatha. But "none of us at the church knew that," said Steele, the Maranatha deacon.

The former president became ill shortly after the coronavirus pandemic began, which brought his tenure as a Sunday school teacher to a close, but he continued to worship at Maranatha on Sundays.

Carter's last Sunday school lesson focused on the "age-old question" of knowing where one's soul would spend eternity, Steele said.

"Looking back now, how fitting was that?"

Liam Adams is a reporter at The Tennessean. Carla Hinton is a religion editor at The Oklahoman.

Habitat

Continued from Page 3D

the poor around the family's home in Plains, Georgia.

Driven by that ingrained sense of mission, the Carters in 1982 founded the Carter Center, which in the ensuing decades saw the former president monitor contentious elections around the world, help with eradicating Guinea worm disease and other global illnesses and work to reduce the stigma around mental health issues.

But despite the magnitude of those accomplishments, somehow his Habitat work edged to the fore of public perception.

"What's interesting about Habitat is that it is one week a year of work, but it's the kind of work that is easy for someone to comprehend because here he is with the hammer – everyone understands that," says Steven Hochman, Carter's assistant and director of research at the Carter Center. "But let's just not forget that millions have avoided conflict or had free elections or been cured from a disease, thanks to his work through the center. It's been overall an inspirational life."

Rosalynn Carter passes nails to her husband, Jimmy Carter, as the couple joins some 1,500 volunteers in Memphis, Tenn., to build 19 homes for a Habitat for Humanity on Aug. 22, 2016.
JIM WEBER/USA TODAY NETWORK

No slacking off allowed on former president's work team

Although Carter's early commitment to Habitat was genuine, the political optics of his involvement served to recraft the narrative around the one-term Democratic president who was swept out of office on the heels of the Iranian hostage crisis by a landslide for Republican Ronald Reagan, says Doug Brinkley, a historian at Rice University in Houston.

"When Carter picks up that hammer in New York in 1984, we're in the middle of the Reagan revolution, and Carter is still seen as a failed ex-president," says Brinkley, author of "The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House," which chronicles the influence of Habitat on Carter's reinvention. "His doing that was a new way to beat up on Reagan. Here Carter is working for poor people while Reagan is cutting back their benefits."

Carter himself put it this way on the organization's website: "Habitat has successfully removed the stigma of charity by substituting it with a sense of partnership."

"A hot meal is great today, but you'll need one tomorrow, and one of the things he liked about Habitat is it was not a handout," says Mary Wharton, who got to know the former president while filming her 2020 documentary, "Jimmy Carter: Rock & Roll President," which chronicles the political support Carter received from musician friends such as the Allman Brothers and Bob Dylan.

"The beneficiaries of these homes have to work alongside you often, which creates a path to self-reliance," she says. "That resonated a lot with him. It was that mix of his deep faith and his background as a military man."

In her film, Wharton captures country stars Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood expressing awe at Carter's drive while helping him during a Carter Work Project week in Nashville. The couple have been regular volunteers with Habitat for more than a decade.

Wharton says that for all of Carter's folksy demeanor, he was fiercely focused when it came to building homes for the poor. Carter instituted a policy that there would be no breaks for chit-chat, autographs, or selfies until the day was done.

He was even competitive. Brooks comments on Carter's taskmaster style in the movie, noting he would casually tell his team that it didn't matter how fast they moved "as long as our house gets done first."

His son James Earl "Chip" Carter III told Wharton that his father cast a long shadow. Carter was the man who would always catch more fish than anyone else, a drive that extended to all aspects of his life, including Habitat.

"Chip said, 'If you try and follow in those footsteps, you fall in, they're too big,' " Wharton says. "When I met him, I was expecting him to be my Southern grandfather, a Mister Rogers type. But with all things, he gets to the point."

Brinkley witnessed that same unflinching resolve firsthand when he brought along college students to build a home with Carter years ago. The former president led through hard work and kept a watchful eye out for anyone slacking off.

Although the arrival of night would bring smiles and laughs and a shared catfish or chicken dinner, the day was all business. "Carter had no tolerance for slackers," Brinkley says. "He'd notice someone who instead of working seemed to going out constantly to get the group pizza or something like that. He had a standard for work, and he'd say, 'Here I am, you guys match me.' "

Habitat CEO Reckford often had volunteers clamoring to be on the former president's work team during those frenetic build weeks. He would always caution them.

"I'd say, 'He's a skilled carpenter and he knows his stuff, so if you want this, it's an honor that comes with high expectation,' " Reckford says. "If things are going well, great. If they're not, then you'd suddenly get a blue-eyed glint from that submarine commander. And trust me, you don't want that."

In Reckford's book about Habitat, "Our Better Angels," for which Carter wrote a foreword, Reckford details a work week in the Philippines in 1999. The humidity was crushing. Most of the team wanted to call it quits. But Carter thought otherwise.

"He walks into a house for an inspection but sees a toilet is missing," says Reckford, retelling the tale. "He told the owner, 'If I show you how to put in your toilet, will you help your son with his home?' And there he goes, down on his knees, installing a toilet. Can you imagine another U.S. president doing that?"

Jimmy Carter, with his wife, Rosalynn, by his side, is sworn in by Chief Justice Warren Burger as the 39th president of the United States on Jan. 20, 1977. Carter would serve four years marked by enduring achievements along with crippling inflation, the Iran hostage crisis and interparty warfare. HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Memorable moments from Jimmy Carter's 100 years

Born to James Earl Carter Sr. and Lillian Gordy Carter on Oct. 1, 1924, in Plains, Georgia, Jimmy Carter achieved numerous accomplishments in his life, and experienced some memorable moments. With time as a Georgia senator, governor and then U.S. president, Carter spent close to 20 years in politics before dedicating his life toward charitable organizations. Here are some of the memorable moments from Carter's life:

Graduation: After attending Georgia Southwestern College and Georgia Tech, Carter attended the U.S. Naval Academy and graduated in 1946 with a bachelor of science degree.

Wedding: After knowing her for most of his youth, Carter married Rosalynn Smith on July 7, 1946. The two eventually had three sons – John William, James Earl III, Donnel Jeffrey – and a daughter, Amy Lynn.

Beginning of political career: After seven years as a naval officer, Carter began his political career by becoming a Georgia state senator in 1963.

Gov. Carter: Despite an unsuccessful first attempt, Carter ran in the 1970 Georgia gubernatorial race and defeated Carl Sanders. He notably criticized his opponent's support of Martin Luther King Jr., but during his inauguration, said, "The time for racial discrimination is over."

Presidential campaign: Carter announced his candidacy for president in December 1974. After starting with little support, Carter's campaign drew attention and clinched the nod at the Democratic National Convention.

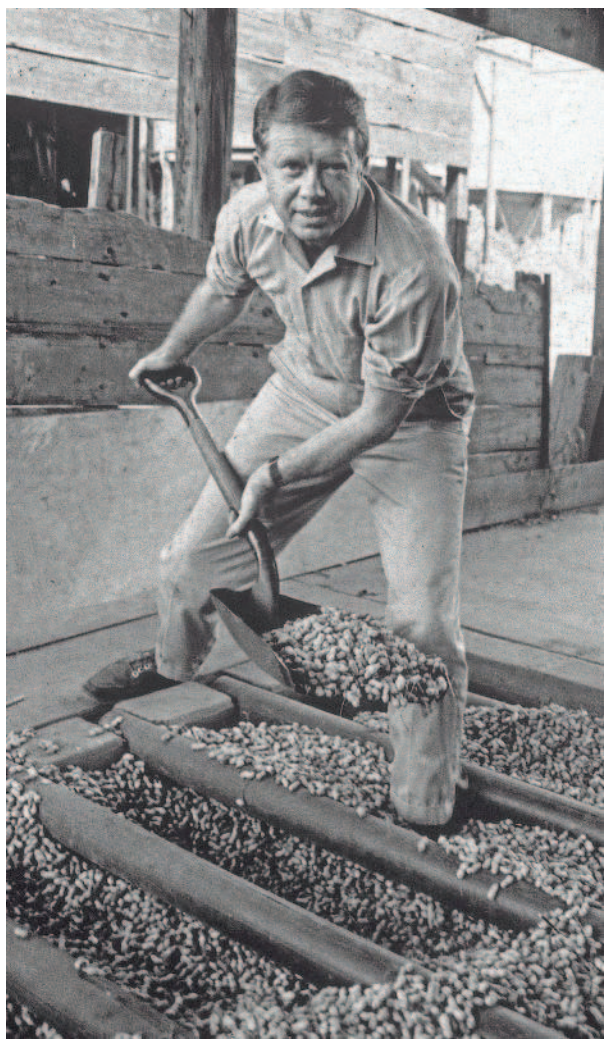
1976 presidential election: Carter debated incumbent President Gerald Ford three times on television. Carter eventually won with 297 electoral votes, compared to Ford's 240. Carter also won 50.1% of the popular vote.

Presidential inauguration and Vietnam War: Carter was inaugurated as the 39th president on Jan. 20, 1977. One day later, he pardoned everyone who evaded the Vietnam War draft.

The Camp David Accords: Carter brokered a historical peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, and witnessed the agreement being signed at the White House on Sept. 17, 1978.

Department of Energy: After comparing the U.S. energy crisis to war, Carter created the first new Cabinet position in over a decade.

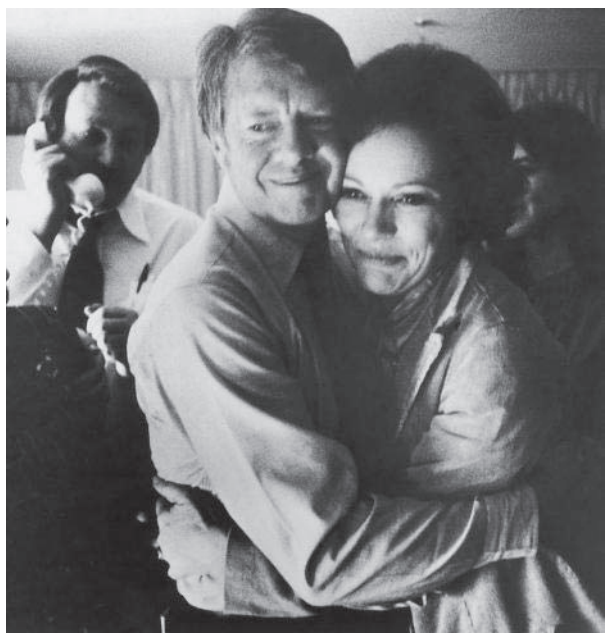
Nuclear power plant meltdown: On March 28, 1979, reactor 2 at Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station in Pennsylvania partially melted. Carter, who served as an engineering officer during his time in the Navy, inspected the plant on April 1. The accident led to increased U.S. nuclear power safety regulations.



Carter's humble beginnings as a peanut farmer were an inspiration for millions of Americans.
HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Department of Education: Carter signed the Department of Education Organization Act in October 1979.

Iran hostage crisis: From Nov. 4, 1979, to Jan. 20, 1981, 52 U.S. citizens were held hostage in the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran. The hostage crisis began when Iranian militants broke into the embassy, marking a low point for Carter's presidency, one that is credited by historians and analysts for contributing to his landslide loss in the 1980 general election to Ronald Reagan.



Carter, once an unlikely candidate for president, embraces his wife, Rosalynn, after receiving news of his election victory on Nov. 2, 1976.
HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES FILE

1980 presidential election: Reagan won the presidency with 489 electoral votes compared to Carter's 49. Carter's only term as president ended on Jan. 20, 1981.

Carter Center: Carter created the nongovernmental organization with the purpose of advancing human rights. Accolades of the organization include observing 113 elections in 39 countries and helping reduce the cases of Guinea worm disease by 99.99%, essentially eradicating it.

Nobel Peace Prize: With his work with The Carter Center, Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

Hurricane Sandy relief: In 2012, Carter helped rebuild homes destroyed by the storm with Habitat for Humanity.

Oldest living president: Carter broke numerous records, claiming the title of longest-living former president on March 22, 2019.

Soulmates: The Carters were married for 77 years before Rosalynn's death on Nov. 19, 2023.

A milestone birthday: Carter celebrated his 100th birthday on Oct. 1, 2024 at his home in Plains.

– Jordan Mendoza, USA TODAY

At a news conference on Nov. 28, 1979, Carter said he still hoped for a resolution to the Iran hostage crisis. It ended on Jan. 20, 1981, after 444 days.
CONSOLIDATED NEWS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, left, Carter and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat meet for talks at Camp David, Maryland, on Sept. 12, 1978.
KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Carter departs Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., after a funeral service for his wife, Rosalynn, on Nov. 29, 2023. She was 96 when she died.
ALEX BRANDON/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

NATION&WORLD EXTRA

INSIDE

Police ID Vegas driver as Army soldier. **5NN**

NEW ORLEANS ATTACK

U.S. ON HIGH ALERT

Bourbon Street massacre and Vegas explosion raise fears of more threats

Tim Reid, Ned Randolph and Helen Coster
REUTERS

NEW ORLEANS – Law enforcement officials in U.S. cities were beefing up security on Thursday after a deadly attack in New Orleans and an explosion outside a Trump hotel in Las Vegas raised fears of more threats in a month packed with large-scale public events.

Police in Washington, the site of the Jan. 9 state funeral for former President Jimmy Carter and President-elect Donald Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration, said in a statement they had raised security across the city "in light of recent events," and that the community will notice an increased police presence.

See ATTACK, Page 5NN

TOP: Law enforcement officers walk on a street in New Orleans on Thursday, a day after the attack. EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

▲ A man plays the trumpet near crosses set up as a memorial in New Orleans on Thursday. ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

◀ Flowers are placed in New Orleans on Thursday after the deadly attack. EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

What we know about La. attack victims

Eight of those killed have been identified

REUTERS

Fifteen people were killed and 30 were injured after a U.S. Army veteran with an ISIS flag on his truck swerved around makeshift barriers and plowed into revelers in New Orleans' crowded French Quarter on New Year's Day.

While authorities have not released the names of the victims, at least eight of those killed have been identified by family members or other associates.

Nicole Perez

Nicole Perez, 28, had just gotten a promotion, was moving into a new apartment and was teaching her 4-year-old son to read before she was killed on Wednesday morning, Kimberly Usher, her boss, told Reuters.

See VICTIMS, Page 5NN

South Korean authorities arrive to arrest Yoon

Impeached president faces investigation over attempted martial law

Eduardo Baptista, Hyunsu Yim and Joyce Lee
REUTERS

SEOUL, South Korea – Authorities sought on Friday to execute an unprecedented arrest warrant for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, evading a crowd of protesters but facing off with security forces inside his residence.

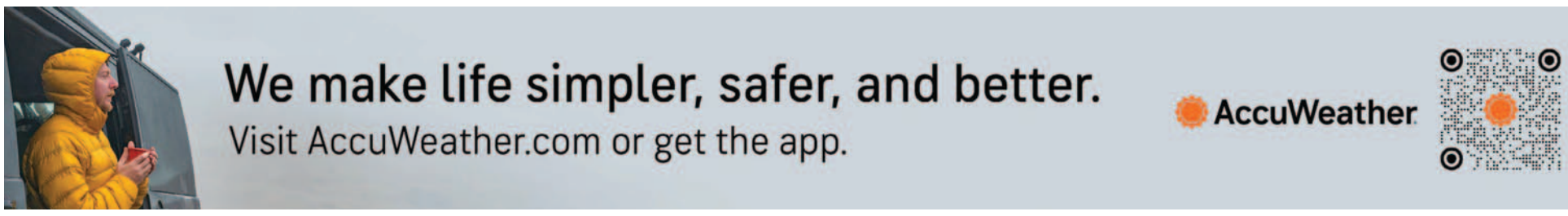
Yoon is under criminal investigation for insurrection over his Dec. 3. martial law attempt that stunned South Korea, Asia's fourth-largest economy and one of the region's most vibrant democracies.

An arrest would be the first for an incumbent South Korean president.

Officials from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials which is leading a joint team of investigators that include the police and prosecutors, had arrived at the gates of Yoon's compound shortly after 7 a.m. local time, according to Reuters witnesses.

See SOUTH KOREA, Page 7NN

CIO officials enter impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's official residence in Seoul on Friday. KIM HONG-JI/ REUTERS

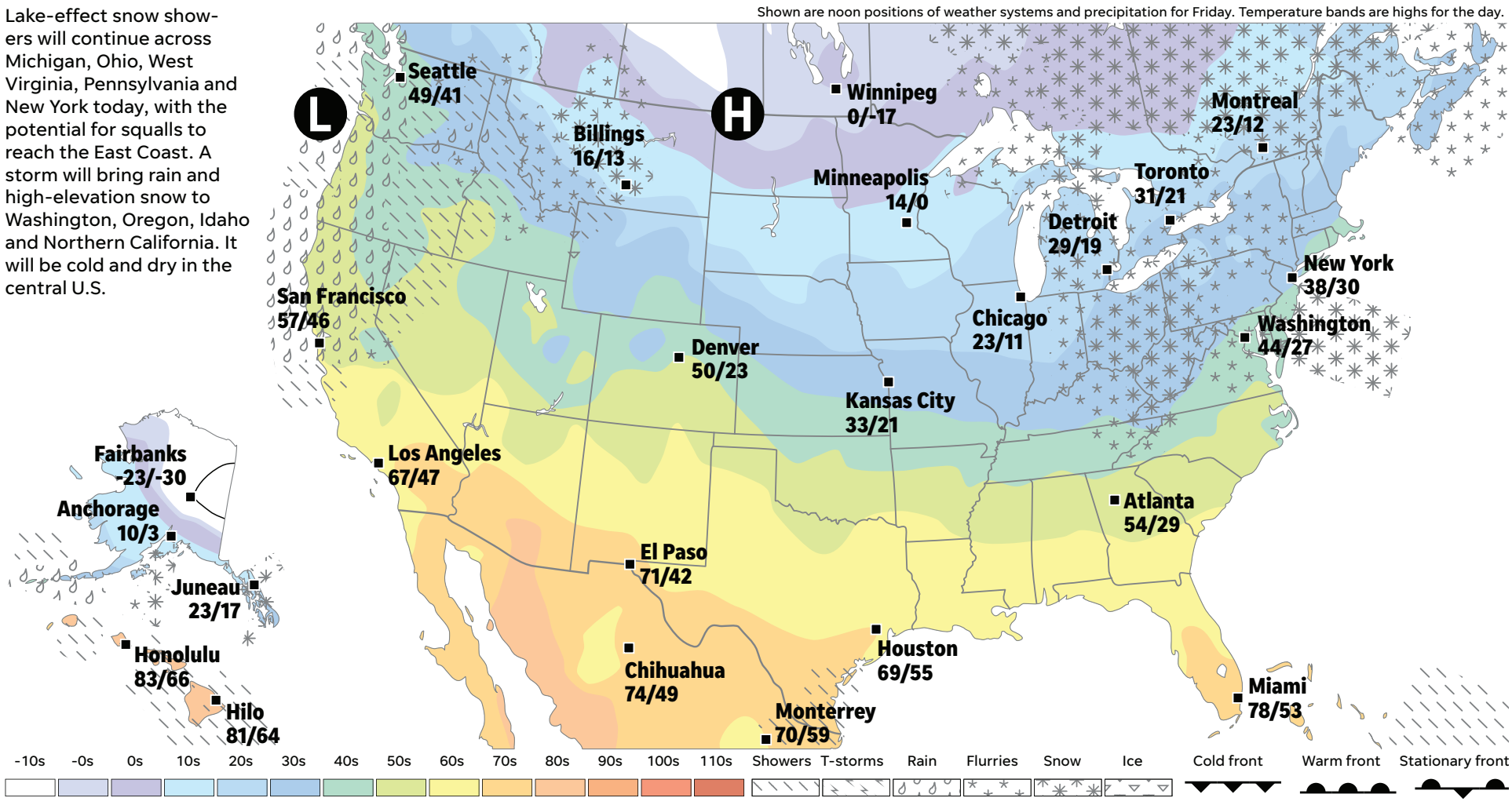


NATIONAL SUMMARY

Lake-effect snow showers will continue across Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York today, with the potential for squalls to reach the East Coast. A storm will bring rain and high-elevation snow to Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Northern California. It will be cold and dry in the central U.S.

In the digital e-edition, you can click anywhere on the US map to get up-to-date forecasts, radar, MinuteCast® and more.

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation for Friday. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



THURSDAY EXTREMES

NATIONAL (for the 48 contiguous states)

High:	**87** at Chino, CA
Low:	**-14** at Boulder, WY
Precip:	**1.34"** at Florence, OR

INTERNATIONAL (excludes Antarctica)

High:	**109** at Esperance, Australia
Low:	**-68** at Batamay, Russia
Precip:	**4.35"** at Tela, Honduras

TODAY IN HISTORY

On Jan. 3, 1777, George Washington noticed it would freeze that night. He ordered bonfires built as a decoy. When the ground froze, Washington's men outflanked the British.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: What is the record low temperature for the lower 48 states in January?

A: -70F at Rogers Pass, Mont., set on Jan. 20, 1954.

NATIONAL CITIES FRIDAY

● Denotes possible travel delays

	High/low/W	Air Quality
Aberdeen, SD	13/-2/pc	22
Abilene, TX	63/49/pc	47
● Accomac, VA	45/26/sn	28
● Adrian, MI	29/21/sf	29
● Akron, OH	28/17/sn	26
Alamogordo, NM	70/38/s	51
● Alexandria, VA	44/25/sf	51
● Alliance, OH	29/18/sn	27
● Amarillo, TX	60/37/s	37
Ames, IA	21/6/c	26
● Anderson, SC	53/27/s	33
● Appleton, WI	21/6/pc	26
● Asheville, NC	45/21/pc	32
● Ashland, OH	28/18/sn	29
Athens, GA	53/27/s	38
● Augusta, GA	58/28/s	47
Austin, TX	65/55/pc	71
Bartlesville, OK	46/27/pc	37
● Battle Creek, MI	26/19/sn	21
Bedford, IN	30/17/sf	27
● Binghamton, NY	27/18/sf	34
Bluffton, SC	59/36/s	36
● Bremerton, WA	45/41/r	20
● Brockton, MA	39/25/s	46
Brownwood, TX	62/49/pc	41
Burlington, IA	24/10/s	24
● Burlington, NC	50/22/pc	35
● Burlington, VT	31/16/pc	28
● Cambridge, OH	33/21/sn	24
Camdenton, MO	38/22/pc	35
● Canandaigua, NY	30/22/sf	37
● Canton, OH	28/18/sn	35
Carlsbad, NM	62/37/s	48
● Chambersburg, PA	36/23/sn	33
● Cherry Hill, NJ	41/27/sn	53
Cincinnati, OH	34/16/sf	25
Clarksville, TN	42/23/s	28
● Coldwater, MI	26/19/sn	25
● Columbus, OH	33/19/sn	26
● Corning, NY	31/22/sf	34
Corpus Christi, TX	73/62/c	33
Daytona Beach, FL	65/43/s	43
Deming, NM	69/31/s	53
DeRidder, LA	66/49/pc	41
Des Moines, IA	21/10/pc	26
● Detroit, MI	29/19/sf	48
Devils Lake, ND	-3/-19/pc	31
● Dover, NH	36/22/s	46
El Paso, TX	71/42/s	55
● Elmira, NY	31/22/sf	33
● Erie, PA	30/22/sn	28
● Eugene, OR	54/46/r	18
Evansville, IN	35/20/s	25
● Fall River, MA	40/26/s	50
Farmington, NM	57/31/c	50
● Fayetteville, NC	54/27/s	32
● Fond du Lac, WI	21/6/s	27
Fort Myers, FL	73/49/s	37
Fort Smith, AR	55/36/pc	49
● Framingham, MA	39/25/s	44
● Freeport, IL	24/9/s	21
● Fremont, OH	30/22/sn	31
Fort Collins, CO	45/20/pc	51
Gadsden, AL	52/25/s	30
Gainesville, FL	64/38/s	42
Galesburg, IL	23/9/s	20
Gastonia, NC	52/22/s	39
Glen Rose, TX	63/50/pc	49
Gonzales, LA	70/50/pc	47
● Great Falls, MT	12/9/sn	38
● Green Bay, WI	21/7/s	22
Greenville, SC	53/23/s	36
● Hackensack, NJ	40/28/pc	54
● Hagerstown, MD	36/24/sn	37
Hattiesburg, MS	65/34/pc	38
Henderson, KY	34/21/s	32
● Hendersonville, NC	46/22/pc	32
● Herkimer, NY	30/18/sf	46
● Hillsdale, MI	26/19/sn	24
● Holland, MI	27/20/sn	28
● Hornell, NY	28/21/sf	32
Houma, LA	69/53/pc	36
● Howell, MI	27/18/sn	33
Hutchinson, KS	40/25/pc	43
Hyannis, MA	38/24/s	38
Indianapolis, IN	27/15/sf	23
Iowa City, IA	22/9/s	24
● Ithaca, NY	29/20/sf	35
Jackson, MS	61/35/s	45
Jackson, TN	46/25/s	34
Jacksonville, FL	64/36/s	40
● Jacksonville, NC	52/27/s	31
● Kent, OH	28/19/sn	32
● Kewanee, IL	24/10/s	24
● Keyser, WV	38/20/sn	33
● Kinston, NC	52/25/pc	32
Knoxville, TN	44/22/sf	26
● Lafayette, IN	25/11/s	20
Lafayette, LA	68/51/pc	40
● Lakeland, FL	68/46/s	37
● Lansing, MI	26/17/sf	34
Las Cruces, NM	69/40/s	53
● Lebanon, PA	37/26/sf	43
Leesburg, FL	66/45/s	40
● Levittown, PA	40/26/pc	51
Lincoln, IL	28/14/s	16
Louisville, KY	38/21/sf	45
Lubbock, TX	62/41/s	42
● Manitowoc, WI	22/8/s	31
● Mansfield, OH	27/17/sn	27
● Marshall, NC	39/18/sn	29
● Marshfield, WI	15/-1/pc	26
● Massillon, OH	29/19/sn	31
● McLean, VA	43/24/sf	42
Melbourne, FL	69/46/s	40
Memphis, TN	49/30/s	51
● Middletown, NY	34/23/c	47
● Milford, MA	37/23/s	44
● Milwaukee, WI	26/12/s	46
● Monroe, MI	29/21/sf	31
Monroe, LA	63/36/s	38
Montgomery, AL	60/30/s	33
● Muncie, IN	27/13/sf	21
Murfreesboro, TN	42/20/s	35
Naples, FL	72/50/pc	36
Nashville, TN	43/25/s	39
● Neptune, NJ	40/27/pc	51
● New Bedford, MA	40/26/s	43
● New Bern, NC	52/27/pc	26
● New Philadelphia, OH	30/20/sn	27
● Newark, OH	34/21/sn	28
● Newton, NJ	36/23/c	50
● New York, NY	38/30/pc	58
Norwich, CT	38/24/s	43
Ocala, FL	66/38/s	44
Oklahoma City, OK	52/38/s	41
Opelousas, LA	68/49/pc	46
● Oshkosh, WI	20/5/s	23
Palm Beach, FL	74/53/pc	30
Palm Springs, CA	77/49/pc	69
Panama City, FL	64/41/pc	31
Pekin, IL	27/13/s	24
Pensacola, FL	65/39/pc	51
Peoria, IL	25/12/s	22
● Petersburg, VA	49/23/c	36
Phoenix, AZ	78/49/pc	56
● Port Huron, MI	30/18/sf	25
● Portsmouth, NH	38/23/s	34
● Poughkeepsie, NY	36/25/pc	41
● Providence, RI	38/25/s	50
Pueblo, CO	58/19/pc	49
● Quincy, MA	39/26/s	52
Redding, CA	55/43/r	21
● Reno, NV	53/28/sh	46
● Ravenna, OH	28/19/sn	29
Richmond, IN	30/14/sf	25
● Rochester, NY	31/22/sf	34
● Rockford, IL	23/9/s	14
Ruidoso, NM	62/43/s	51
● Salem, OR	54/46/r	24
Salina, KS	37/23/pc	31
Salinas, CA	59/42/r	37
● Salisbury, MD	44/26/sn	29
San Angelo, TX	68/47/pc	40
Sarasota, FL	69/50/s	38
● Savannah, GA	61/34/s	48
● Sheboygan, WI	23/10/s	27
● Shelby, NC	51/21/s	34
● Sherman, TX	61/46/pc	51
Shreveport, LA	65/43/pc	45
Silver City, NM	66/35/s	51
Sioux Falls, SD	19/5/c	18
● Somerset, PA	28/14/sn	30
● Somerville, NJ	40/25/pc	51
South Bend, IN	25/18/sf	20
Spartanburg, SC	53/25/s	34
Springfield, IL	28/14/s	17
Springfield, MO	39/25/pc	41
St. Augustine, FL	64/42/s	39
St. Cloud, MN	12/-4/pc	20
St. George, UT	58/36/c	41
● Staunton, VA	42/22/sf	29
● Stevens Point, WI	17/2/s	25
Stockton, CA	54/38/r	51
● Stroudsburg, PA	35/23/c	49
Stuart, FL	72/49/pc	37
● Sturgis, MI	26/19/sn	25
Tallahassee, FL	66/35/s	35
Thibodaux, LA	69/52/pc	45
Topeka, KS	35/23/pc	36
Tuscaloosa, AL	57/28/s	32
● Utica, NY	28/17/sn	41
Ventura, CA	59/46/pc	58
Victorville, CA	70/40/pc	53
● Vineland, NJ	41/23/sn	47
Visalia, CA	67/42/pc	60
● Washington, DC	44/27/sf	40
Watertown, SD	11/-3/pc	17
● Wausau, WI	16/0/pc	22
● Waynesboro, PA	36/23/sn	36
● White Plains, NY	37/26/pc	51
Wichita Falls, TX	58/44/pc	36
● Wilmington, DE	41/25/sn	51
● Wilmington, NC	54/28/s	38
● Wisconsin Rapids, WI	16/1/s	24
● Wooster, OH	29/19/sn	23
● Worcester, MA	34/21/s	51
● York, PA	38/25/sn	42

Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good; 51-100, Moderate; 101-150, Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200, Unhealthy; 201-300, Very unhealthy; 301-500, Hazardous

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

	Friday High/low/W	Saturday High/low/W
Acapulco	87/70/pc	87/70/pc
Addis Ababa	73/47/pc	74/46/pc
Algiers	65/40/s	66/40/s
Amman	58/37/s	61/43/pc
Amsterdam	41/33/pc	38/31/c
Ankara	46/30/pc	45/39/c
● Asuncion	95/71/t	96/63/s
Athens	60/45/s	61/46/pc
● Auckland	73/61/sh	70/58/sh
Baghdad	64/35/pc	63/35/s
Bangkok	90/70/s	90/68/pc
Beijing	43/13/pc	44/19/c
Beirut	66/52/c	66/56/c
Belgrade	44/26/r	37/26/pc
● Berlin	37/29/sn	35/27/pc
Bogota	66/50/r	65/48/r
Brussels	39/31/pc	37/33/c
● Bucharest	49/34/c	43/23/pc
Budapest	39/29/pc	38/24/s
Buenos Aires	83/62/s	78/67/s
Cairo	69/52/s	70/52/pc
● Cape Town	80/61/s	80/64/s
Caracas	89/74/r	90/75/t
Casablanca	72/39/pc	73/46/c
Colombo	87/74/pc	87/73/pc
● Copenhagen	35/27/sf	35/32/pc
Damascus	56/31/s	55/35/c
Dublin	37/30/s	39/35/r
Geneva	41/23/c	39/36/r
● Guatemala City	70/56/sh	71/56/c
Hanoi	81/60/pc	77/58/pc
Harare	77/64/t	77/66/t
Havana	80/61/pc	75/56/c
Helsinki	28/18/pc	28/26/c
Hong Kong	71/58/pc	68/58/pc
Jakarta	91/76/t	92/76/sh
Jerusalem	58/39/s	61/48/pc
Johannesburg	78/61/t	77/61/t
● Kabul	39/31/r	37/12/sh
Khartoum	88/66/pc	91/67/pc
● Kyiv	36/28/c	32/22/pc
Kingston	87/75/c	86/75/c
● La Paz	58/42/r	56/41/r
Lagos	91/77/pc	91/78/s
Lima	76/67/pc	76/67/c
Lisbon	61/50/c	61/58/c
London	40/29/s	39/34/c
Madrid	48/33/c	48/37/c
● Manila	88/76/sh	86/74/sh
Mexico City	69/47/pc	68/49/c
Milan	50/33/pc	44/37/c
Mombasa	91/76/pc	90/76/pc
● Montevideo	73/62/pc	73/60/sh
● Montreal	23/12/sn	16/9/sn
● Moscow	27/21/c	26/19/sn
● Nairobi	78/60/sh	79/61/pc
New Delhi	69/46/pc	73/50/pc
● Panama City	85/73/r	84/74/r
Paris	39/26/pc	37/33/c
Port-au-Prince	89/65/sh	88/68/c
Rio de Janeiro	88/75/pc	87/75/pc
Riyadh	62/36/pc	66/39/pc
Rome	59/42/r	57/45/pc
San Jose	81/67/t	78/66/sh
San Salvador	84/62/c	84/62/pc
Santiago	89/57/s	88/60/pc
Sao Paulo	83/68/t	83/66/r
● Sarajevo	43/18/r	29/12/pc
Shanghai	53/36/pc	56/45/pc
● Singapore	89/77/t	87/77/t
Stockholm	19/12/s	23/13/s
Sydney	77/67/c	84/69/s
Taipei	63/58/c	70/59/pc
Tegucigalpa	75/61/c	75/61/c
Tehran	47/31/s	48/32/s
Tokyo	45/38/r	50/37/pc
● Toronto	31/21/sf	27/21/sf
Tunis	63/52/s	64/48/pc
● Vancouver	43/41/r	48/42/r
Vienna	40/30/pc	37/27/c
● Warsaw	36/26/sn	33/26/c
Yerevan	39/24/pc	39/22/pc
Zagreb	40/23/sn	35/23/c
Zurich	35/21/c	31/29/sn

● Denotes possible travel delays Friday

Weather(W): **s**-sunny, **pc**-partly cloudy, **c**-cloudy, **sh**-showers, **t**-thunderstorms, **r**-rain, **sf**-snow flurries, **sn**-snow, **i**-ice.

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COLOMBIA

Broken promises

Colombia is peaceful today but that peace is fragile.

In 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, reached a peace deal to end more than 50 years of civil war, which has killed 450,000 people.

But soon after, Colombian voters rejected the agreement in a referendum.

Still, the Colombian government and some rebel leaders agreed to end the conflict anyway and work together to foster peace. Today, former guerrilla fighters like Juan Carlos Garcia, who spent years in prison on terrorism and other charges, have laid down their arms and now work as farmers.

At the same time, some FARC rebels have refused to lay down their arms, and critics – like those who spoke to the Berghof Foundation – say officials have failed to address the economic and political problems that sparked the rebellion in the first place.

"We're at a crossroads because the Colombian state has not fulfilled what was agreed upon," Garcia told New Lines Magazine.

For example, in 2022, voters elected President Gustavo Petro, a former FARC fighter who is the country's first leftist leader because he pledged to give 7.4 million acres to victims of the civil war and work for "Paz Total" (Total Peace). But, as Reuters reported, he has been slow to fulfill that promise.

Petro also reached a ceasefire deal with the National Liberation Army, or ELN, a Marxist-Leninist rebel force that is still operating in the country. He suspended talks with the group in September, however, after ELN rebels killed two Colombian soldiers.

Meanwhile, right-wing paramilitaries that arose to combat FARC fighters in rural Colombia are also still active in the country.

As InSight Crime reported, the Conquering Self-Defense Forces of the Sierra Nevada, for instance, runs drugs in the country's north. The group is talking to the government about laying down its arms, but those talks have yet to go anywhere. Critics of the talks also say they are unlikely to work because groups like those make too much money and aren't being offered anything comparable.

Meanwhile, new armed groups are springing up now and growing stronger. These groups are more interested in ill-gotten gains and drug revenues than left-wing or conservative ideals, the United Nations added.

As a result, Colombia is one of the most violent places in the world.

Analysts at the Washington Office on Latin America say that is the fault of right-wing President Ivan Duque, who served from 2018 to 2022, because he undermined the 2016 peace accords. Duque failed to devote money to fulfill the government's commitments under the deal, they argued.

In the ensuing vacuum, the bonds that rebels and members of paramilitary groups have formed with each other over the past decades have offered community to Colombians who otherwise might gain a sense of

"Total peace is not popular; some two-thirds of Colombians say it is going badly ... Mr. Petro's successor may well ditch it. To avoid that he needs big wins, fast. Sadly for him (and) for Colombians ... that looks unlikely."

The Economist
Writing about Colombian President Gustavo Petro's "Total Peace"

belonging from citizenship, Peace Research Institute Oslo senior researcher Julia Palik argued in the Conversation.

Petro, meanwhile, is running out of time for his plan for Total Peace, according to the Economist, mainly because his term will expire in less than two years. "Total peace is not popular; some two-thirds of Colombians say it is going badly," the Economist wrote. "Mr. Petro's successor may well ditch it. To avoid that he needs big wins, fast. Sadly for him (and) for Colombians ... that looks unlikely."

DISCOVERIES

The invaders

In December 2020, Japan's Hayabusa2 mission successfully returned samples from the asteroid Ryugu, delivering them to Earth in a sealed capsule. The pristine material was then distributed to scientists globally to unlock the secrets of the early solar system.

As researcher Matthew Genge and his team at Imperial College London began to analyze the material in 2022, they noticed something unusual while studying one of the Ryugu grains: Tiny rod-shaped filaments appeared on the rock's surface, increasing in number with time.

"We found microorganisms in a sample returned from an asteroid," Genge recently told Space.com. "They appeared on the rock and spread with time before finally dying off."

Initially, the discovery raised tantalizing questions about extraterrestrial life, such as whether these microbes have originated from the space rock.

Their new study, however, dashed those hopes. The rapid growth of the filaments strongly suggested terrestrial origins.

Genge explained that "the change in population suggests they only appeared after the rock was exposed to the atmosphere, more than a year after it was returned to Earth."

The contamination likely occurred during sample preparation at the Natural History Museum in London, where the grain was polished for study. Despite meticulous protocols, Genge admitted to Scientific American that "you only need one bacterial cell to fall on your specimen – and that's it, it's contaminated."

Andrew Steele, an astrobiologist at Carnegie Science who was not involved in the study, said the episode illustrates the challenges of working with extraterrestrial samples. "Ultimately, we do live on a planet that is ruled by microbes, and chance events do happen," he told Scientific American.

Industry shuts down in breakaway Moldovan region

Territory is worst casualty of Russian gas transit halt

Mark Trevelyan and Alexander Tanas
REUTERS

The cutoff of Russian gas supplies to Moldova's breakaway Transdniestria region has forced the closure of all industrial companies except food producers, an official said on Thursday.

The mainly Russian-speaking territory of about 450,000 people, which split from Moldova in the 1990s as the Soviet Union collapsed, has suffered a painful and immediate hit from Wednesday's cutoff of Russian gas supplies to central and eastern Europe via Ukraine.

"All industrial enterprises are idle, with the exception of those engaged in food production – that is, directly ensuring food security for Transdniestria," Sergei Obolonik, first deputy prime minister of the region, told a local news channel.

"It is too early to judge how the situation will develop. ... The problem is so extensive that if it is not resolved for a long time, we will already have irreversible changes – that is, enterprises will lose their ability to start up."

Ukraine had allowed Russia to keep pumping gas across its territory despite nearly three years of war, and was earning up to $1 billion a year in transit fees. But Kyiv refused to renew a five-year deal that expired on Wednesday.

European gas buyers such as Slovakia and Austria had prepared for the cutoff by securing alternative supplies. But Transdniestria – despite its ties to Moscow and the presence of 1,500 Russian troops there – has been crippled.

The local energy company cut heating and hot water to households on Wednesday, and urged families to keep warm by gathering in a single room, covering windows with curtains or blankets and using electric heaters.

Gas reserves

The leader of pro-Russian Transdniestria, Vadim Krasnoselsky, said the region had gas reserves that could last for 10 days of limited usage in northern parts and twice as long in the south.

He said the main power plant had switched from gas to coal and should be able to supply electricity to residents in January and February.

Russia had been pumping about 2 billion cubic meters of gas per year to Transdniestria – including the power plant which also provided energy for the whole of Moldova, a country of 2.5 million people that wants to join the European Union.

Moldova has a long history of gas payment disputes and tense relations with Russia.

The ex-Soviet republic is trying to cut energy consumption by at least a third and import more than 60% of its needs from neighboring Romania.

The head of Moldovan national gas company Moldovagaz, Vadim Ceban, said his company had told the gas distribution company in the separatist enclave, Tiraspoltransgaz, that it was willing to help purchase gas from European countries to ease shortages.

But any gas supplied to the region would have to be paid for at market prices, he told TV8 television.

Transdniestria has for several years paid nothing for supplies from Russian gas giant Gazprom under a tacit understanding with Moscow.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has described the end of Russian gas transit as "one of Moscow's biggest defeats" and urged the United States to supply more gas to Europe.

Since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Europe has slashed its dependence on Russian energy and increased imports from other sources including piped gas from Norway and liquefied natural gas from the U.S. and Qatar.

In a statement on Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the loss of Russian gas was hurting Europe economically, and the U.S. was the beneficiary.

"Responsibility for the cessation of Russian gas supplies lies entirely with the United States, the puppet Kyiv regime, as well as the authorities of European states that sacrificed the well-being of their citizens for the sake of providing financial support for the American economy," she said.

Zelenskyy: Trump can be decisive in helping stop Putin

REUTERS

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday that U.S. President-elect Donald Trump could be decisive in the outcome of the 34-month-old war with Russia and help stop Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin.

Zelenskyy, facing advances by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, said in an interview with Ukrainian television that Trump had told him he would be one of the first to visit Washington after the presidential inauguration this month.

Zelenskyy also said a priority was to stabilize the front line early in the new year. Putin, he said, feared negotiations as they would be tantamount to a defeat for Russia.

"Trump can be decisive. For us, this is the most important thing," Zelenskyy said in a televised interview.

"His qualities are indeed there," Zelenskyy said of Trump.

"He can be decisive in this war. He is capable of stopping Putin or, to put it more fairly, help us stop Putin. He is able to do this."

Zelenskyy has said that achieving a just peace for Ukraine meant receiving solid security guarantees from its allies, joining the European Union and receiving an invitation to join the NATO alliance, a notion rejected by Moscow.

"Naturally, any security guarantees without the United States are weak security guarantees for Ukraine," he said.

Zelenskyy said he wanted to ensure that any U.S. plan on a settlement took account of Ukraine's views.

"It cannot be otherwise. We are Ukraine and it's our independence, our land and our future."

He also hoped that Trump's administration could establish quick contact with Russia.

Putin has said Moscow is open to talks but they must take account of Russia's gains in the war and its annexation of four Ukrainian regions.

With Russian forces capturing village after village on the eastern front in their fastest advance since the February 2022 invasion, Zelenskyy said stabilizing the front was critical.

"They are putting pressure on our boys, who are exhausted and that is a fact. We will do everything to at least stabilize the front in January," he said.

Zelenskyy, elected in 2019, repeated that new elections could not be held as long as a wartime state of emergency remained in place, but said he would consider running again once conditions permitted.

"I don't know how this war will end,"

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he hoped that President-elect Donald Trump's administration could establish quick contact with Russia.
SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS FILE

he said. "If I can do more than I am able, then I will probably view such a decision (seeking a new term) more positively. For now this is not an objective for me."

FINANCIAL MARKETS

Wall Street drops in 2025's first session

Stephen Culp
REUTERS

NEW YORK – Wall Street seesawed to a lower close on Thursday amid choppy trading, as investors embarked on the new year facing the cross-currents of solid labor market data, a rising dollar and tumbling Tesla shares.

All three major U.S. stocks ended the session in negative territory, a reversal of an earlier rally but off session lows.

"We had some macro news but somewhat mixed, and you know we have a very strong dollar today," said Peter Cardillo, chief market economist at Spartan Capital Securities in New York.

"There are a few hurdles over the next couple of weeks, and those are next Friday's employment data and the beginning of fourth quarter earnings."

"In the short term, we're looking at choppiness and a struggle for direction until we get those hurdles out of the way," Cardillo added.

Shares of Tesla sank 6.1% after the company reported its first annual drop in deliveries, as incentives failed to stem a decline in demand for its aging lineup of electric vehicles. A report from the Labor Department showed that initial and continuing claims for unemployment benefits both fell last week, supporting the narrative of a solid jobs market and adding weight to the possibility that the U.S. central bank could let its key interest rate stand at this month's policy meeting.

Looking past uncertainties regarding the pace of interest rate cuts from the Federal Reserve, policies to be enacted by the incoming Donald Trump administration and various hot spots of geopolitical unrest, market participants chose to focus on the strength of the United States economy. Wall Street's main indexes notched double-digit gains in 2024, with the benchmark S&P 500 recording its best two-year run since 1997-1998.

Those gains were driven by the Federal Reserve's first rate cuts in 3½ years, the ongoing artificial intelligence boom and expectations of pro-business policies from the incoming Trump administration. The rally lost steam in the closing weeks of 2024, with the S&P 500 and the Dow marking declines for December, as markets priced in the likelihood of fewer rate cuts from the Fed this year. The S&P and the Nasdaq have now posted five consecutive sessions in the red, their longest losing streaks since mid-April.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 151.95 points, or 0.36%, to 42,392.27; the S&P 500 lost 13.08 points, or 0.22%, to 5,868.55; and the Nasdaq Composite lost 30.00 points, or 0.16%, to 19,280.79.

Among the 11 major sectors of the S&P 500, consumer discretionary stocks were down the most, weighed by Tesla.

Energy shares, buoyed by rising crude prices, enjoyed the largest percentage gains. Apple lost 2.6% as the iPhone maker offered rare discounts in China in order to compete against domestic rivals. Crypto stocks such as Coinbase, MicroStrategy and MARA Holdings gained between 2.6% and 3.6%, tracking rising Bitcoin prices. Advancing issues outnumbered decliners by a 1.14-to-1 ratio on the NYSE. There were 77 new highs and 114 new lows on the NYSE. On the Nasdaq, 2,386 stocks rose and 1,988 fell as advancing issues outnumbered decliners by a 1.2-to-1 ratio. The S&P 500 posted one new 52-week high and 11 new lows, while the Nasdaq Composite recorded 60 new highs and 34 new lows.

Volume on U.S. exchanges was 15.01 billion shares, compared with the 14.92 billion average for the full session over the last 20 trading days.

The pan-European STOXX 600 index rose 0.6% to 510.67, reversing modest losses earlier in the session as trading volumes were light with investors still returning from their New Year's holidays.

A report from the Labor Department showed that initial and continuing claims for unemployment benefits both fell last week, supporting the narrative of a solid jobs market and adding weight to the possibility that the U.S. central bank could let its key interest rate stand at this month's policy meeting.

Ex-crypto executive pleads not guilty to fraud charges in US

Luc Cohen
REUTERS

NEW YORK – Do Kwon, the South Korean cryptocurrency entrepreneur behind two digital currencies that lost an estimated $40 billion in 2022, pleaded not guilty on Thursday to U.S. criminal fraud charges after being extradited from Montenegro this week.

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan on Thursday unsealed a nine-count indictment charging Kwon, who co-founded Singapore-based Terraform Labs and developed the TerraUSD and Luna currencies, with securities fraud, wire fraud, commodities fraud and money laundering conspiracy.

Kwon, 33, wore an olive green long-sleeved shirt and black sweatpants as his lawyer Andrew Chesley entered the plea at a hearing before U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert Lehrburger in Manhattan federal court.

The judge ordered Kwon detained after Chesley said he would not seek bail at this time. Kwon took a copy of the 79-page indictment with him as U.S. Marshals led him out of the courtroom. He is expected back in court on Jan. 8.

Kwon had agreed last June to pay an $80 million civil fine and be banned from crypto transactions as part of a $4.55 billion settlement that he and Terraform reached with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

In Thursday's indictment, the Manhattan U.S. Attorney's Office alleged Kwon misled investors in 2021 about TerraUSD, a so-called stablecoin designed to maintain a value of $1.

Kwon allegedly told investors a computer algorithm known as "Terra Protocol" had restored the coin's value when it slipped below its peg in May 2021, when in fact he arranged for a high-frequency trading firm to secretly buy millions of dollars of the token to artificially prop up its price.

Former crypto executive Do Kwon is charged with securities fraud, wire fraud, commodities fraud and money laundering conspiracy.
STEVO VASILJEVIC/REUTERS FILE

Prosecutors said that false claim and others drove retail and institutional investors to buy Terraform products and boost the value of Luna, a more traditional token developed by Kwon that fluctuated in value but was closely linked to TerraUSD, to $50 billion by the spring of 2022.

"Much of this growth followed Kwon's brazen deceptions about Terraform and its technology," the indictment said.

When TerraUSD's value began sliding again in May 2022, the trading firm warned that propping it up "wasn't so simple this time," according to the indictment.

TerraUSD and Luna crashed that month, dragging down the value of other cryptocurrencies, including bitcoin, and caused wider havoc in the crypto market. Prosecutors did not identify the trading firm. SEC lawyers said in their civil case that Jump Trading had propped up TerraUSD in May 2021.

Jump did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Montenegro detention

In a trial on the SEC claims, a federal jury in Manhattan found Kwon and Terraform liable last April for defrauding cryptocurrency investors. Terraform's lawyer had said in closing arguments that the company and Kwon had been truthful about their products and how they worked, even when they failed.

Kwon did not attend that trial because he had been detained in Montenegro since March 2023 on forgery charges.

He was handed over to U.S. law enforcement officers on Tuesday at an airport in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro.

Terraform declared bankruptcy last January.

Kwon is one of several cryptocurrency moguls to face federal charges after a slump in digital token prices in 2022 prompted the collapse of a number of companies.

Sam Bankman-Fried, who founded the exchange FTX, is appealing his conviction and 25-year sentence last March for stealing $8 billion from customers.

Alex Mashinsky, the founder and former CEO of cryptocurrency lender Celsius Network, pleaded guilty last month to two counts of fraud.

Constellation inks $1B nuclear power contract with federal government

Laila Kearney and Timothy Gardner
REUTERS

NEW YORK – Constellation Energy has been awarded a record $1 billion in contracts to supply nuclear power to the U.S. government over the next decade, the company said on Thursday.

Constellation, the country's largest operator of nuclear power plants, will deliver electricity to more than 13 federal agencies as part of the agreements with the U.S. General Services Administration.

The deal is the biggest energy purchase in the history of the GSA, which constructs and manages federal buildings, and is among the first major climate-focused energy agreement by the U.S. government to include electricity generated from existing nuclear reactors.

The GSA estimated that the contracts, set to begin on April 25, will comprise over 10 million megawatt-hours over 10 years and provide electricity equivalent to powering more than 1 million homes annually.

The procurement will deliver electricity to 80 federal facilities located throughout the PJM Interconnection, a regional transmission operator with service covering more than 65 million people. The U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Reserve Board of Governors and the Army Corps of Engineers are some of the facilities that will receive the power.

The nuclear power industry, which saw several decades of contraction over rising safety costs and concerns about radioactive waste, has attracted renewed interest in the last year from Big Tech and government agencies in search of carbon-free electricity to meet the rising energy needs.

The nuclear power industry has attracted renewed interest in the last year from Big Tech and government agencies in search of carbon-free electricity.
SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS FILE

"This agreement is another powerful example of how things have changed," Constellation CEO Joe Dominguez said in a release.

Constellation said the deal will enable it to extend the licenses of existing nuclear plants and invest in new equipment and technology that will increase output by about 135 megawatts.

"The investments we make as a result of this contract will keep these plants operating reliably for decades to come and put new, clean nuclear energy on the grid while making the best use of taxpayer dollars," Dominguez said.

The GSA said in the face of uncertainty over future electricity prices and soaring power demand from data centers and AI facilities, the contracts will provide federal agencies with budgetary stability by keeping electricity costs fixed for 10 years. Four buildings in the nation's capital will be converted to electric boilers and heat pumps .

Union criticizes Nippon Steel proposal for lack of long-term commitment

REUTERS

The United Steelworkers union expressed concerns about Nippon Steel's latest proposal that gives the U.S. government veto power over any potential reductions in U.S. Steel's production capacity, if they get the approval to merge.

The union, which has opposed U.S. Steel's merger with the Japanese steel giant, said Nippon's offer fails to commit to sustaining production over the long term or enhancing domestic capacity in integrated facilities.

"Protecting capacity only means moth-balling our equipment, allowing it to rust away to the point that it is no longer feasible to re-start," the union said in a statement on its website on Thursday. The proposal "is nothing but a 'Hail Mary' pass destined to fall to the ground," it added.

On Tuesday, reports said Nippon Steel made a proposal to give the government a final say over any potential production cuts, as part of its efforts to secure President Joe Biden's approval for acquiring the American steelmaker.

In 2023, Nippon clinched the deal to buy U.S. Steel at a hefty premium, but the merger has since faced opposition from the powerful Steelworkers' union as well as politicians.

"The truth remains that this transaction is the best way to ensure that U.S. Steel, including its employees, communities, and customers, will thrive well into the future," U.S. Steel said on Thursday in response to the union's statement.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States has referred the decision to approve or block the deal to Biden, who must decide on the deal by Jan. 7.

If he takes no action, it would result in the merger's automatic approval.

Nippon Steel did not immediately respond to Reuters' request for comments.

Police ID Vegas driver as Army soldier

Man in Cybertruck killed himself, injured 7 in blast

Rich McKay and Hannah Lang
REUTERS

Officials on Thursday positively identified the person found dead inside the Cybertruck that exploded outside the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas as a U.S. Army soldier from Colorado, while the FBI said it was not yet clear if the blast was an act of terrorism.

The FBI said it had so far found no definitive link between the New Year's Day New Orleans truck attack that killed 15 people and the Cybertruck explosion in Las Vegas later on the same day, which left seven people with minor injuries.

The Cybertruck driver was identified as Matthew Livelsberger, an active-duty Army soldier from Colorado Springs, and police said he acted alone.

Livelsberger killed himself with a gunshot to the mouth, police said, citing a report from the Clark County Coroner/Medical Examiner, according to a post on X by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

Livelsberger was inside the vehicle when gasoline canisters and large firework mortars in the truck bed exploded, police said.

Police previously had told a news conference they believed the person found in the truck was Livelsberger, but because the body was burned beyond recognition, investigators were awaiting confirmation from DNA evidence and medical records.

Livelsberger shot himself just before explosives in the vehicle were detonated, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahill told reporters. A handgun was found at his feet.

It was one of two semi-automatic handguns found in the Cybertruck, both of which were lawfully purchased by Livelsberger on Dec. 30. Law enforcement also found military identification, a passport, an iPhone and credit cards in the truck.

Livelsberger was assigned to the Army Special Operations Command and was on approved leave at the time of his death, an Army official said. The Army Special Operations Command would not comment on an ongoing investigation, a spokesperson said.

A U.S. official told Reuters that Livelsberger had been awarded a Bronze Star for valor and an Army commendation for valor, along with a Combat Infantryman Badge. He completed five combat deployments to Afghanistan, the official said.

A close relative of Livelsberger, who asked that his name not be used because he did not want to be publicly linked to the suspect, told Reuters that Livelsberger always wanted to be an "Army soldier, in Special Forces, even as a little kid. And when he achieved that, he was a soldier's soldier."

Livelsberger was a supporter of President-elect Donald Trump throughout the Republican's political career, seeing him as someone who loves the military, the man told Reuters. "He thought Trump was the greatest thing in the world."

Livelsberger went to high school in Bucyrus in northern Ohio, the man said, where he played football and baseball and appeared happy and popular.

Members of the FBI Evidence Response Team search at a townhouse in Colorado Springs, Colo., in relation to the explosion in Las Vegas on Thursday. ISAIAH J. DOWNING/REUTERS

The man said that there was no inkling in the family that Livelsberger was planning something like the Las Vegas bombing. He said he could not reconcile what Livelsberger is believed to have done with the person he knew both as a child and man.

Livelsberger graduated from Bucyrus High School in 2005, according to Ohio media. He immediately left to join the military after graduation, his relative said.

Livelsberger did not appear to have had a criminal record, McMahill said.

He has been linked to addresses in Colorado Springs since 2013, and local news channel FOX21 reported law enforcement officials were at a townhouse complex there on Wednesday night.

The FBI's Denver office on Thursday said a search of a residential address in Colorado Springs by federal and local authorities was related to the Las Vegas explosion.

Videos taken by witnesses inside and outside the Las Vegas hotel showed the Cybertruck, an electric vehicle with a distinctive angular design, exploding and flames pouring out of it, as it sat in front of the hotel around 8:40 a.m. local time on Wednesday.

A Trump spokesperson did not return a request for comment on Thursday. The president-elect's son, Eric Trump, praised Las Vegas fire and law enforcement officials on Wednesday for their quick action following the explosion.

The Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas is part of the Trump Organization, the company of Donald Trump, who will return to the White House on Jan. 20. Tesla CEO Elon Musk was a key backer of Trump in his 2024 presidential campaign and is also an adviser to the incoming president.

"It's not lost on us that it's in front of the Trump building, that it's a Tesla vehicle, but we don't have information at this point that definitively tells us or suggests it was because of this particular ideology, or... any of the reasoning behind it," McMahill said.

Police said Livelsberger rented the Cybertruck in Denver on Dec. 28 and made stops in several cities including Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Flagstaff, Arizona, before arriving in Las Vegas early on Wednesday.

The truck drove along the city's hotel- and casino-lined Strip, drove through the Trump hotel's driveway and later returned to the valet area. The Trump hotel was evacuated and most guests were moved to another hotel.

A man runs with a banner that reads "Love" in New Orleans on Thursday, a day after people were killed by a man driving a truck in an attack.

EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

Attack

Continued from Page 1NN

Trump is also due to hold a "victory rally" at Washington's Capital One Arena on Jan. 19. By Wednesday night, as fans arrived for a Washington Wizards basketball game at the arena, vehicle barriers closed off an adjacent street, a security measure not usually seen before the NBA team's home games.

Trump's Nov. 5 presidential election victory is due to be certified by the U.S. Congress on Jan. 6 – the fourth anniversary of an attack on the U.S. Capitol building by Trump supporters at the same ceremony in 2021.

For the first time, the ceremony has been designated a National Special Security Event, a decision made before the New Orleans attack. That designation means the U.S. Secret Service will take the lead security role, the agency told Reuters in a statement.

"We will continue to work with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners in assessing the ever-changing threat landscape and will adjust our security plans as needed," said Matthew Young, a U.S. Secret Service spokesperson.

Investigation into New Orleans attack

The investigation into what motivated a U.S. Army veteran carrying an Islamic State flag on his truck to plow into a crowd of New Year's revelers in New Orleans continued, as authorities beefed up security for the Sugar Bowl college football game played less than a mile from Wednesday's mayhem. At least 15 people, including the suspect, were killed in the attack.

FBI officials said they were looking for links between the New Orleans attack and a separate incident on Wednesday in which a Tesla Cybertruck packed with gasoline canisters and large firework mortars exploded outside the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas.

The FBI Washington Field Office said in a statement that while it did not have information linking any local threat with the New Orleans attack, it was sharing information with other law enforcement agencies to disrupt potential threats.

On Wednesday, Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry declared a state of emergency in Orleans Parish ahead of the Feb. 9 Super Bowl football game and Mardi Gras. Authorities said on Thursday the governor's declaration will allow additional resources to remain in the city through the end of Mardi Gras on March 4.

New Orleans City Council president Helena Moreno said a security perimeter around the Superdome, where the Sugar Bowl game kicked off on Thursday afternoon, had been expanded with water-filled barricades. The stadium had been swept multiple times with bomb-sniffing dogs.

The game was postponed from Wednesday after the truck attack.

"The level of resources and security in my opinion is unprecedented," Moreno told a reporter. That included 100 National Guardsmen and law enforcement officials from multiple agencies, she said.

In New York, there were more police than usual around Penn Station, a major train station, with nearby road closures.

The city's mayor, Eric Adams, said on social media that after the New Orleans attack, the New York Police Department heightened security at several locations, including Trump Tower and Times Square.

Despite the lack of credible threats, "we are on alert," Adams wrote.

The NYPD said in a statement: "The NYPD has been closely monitoring recent events in New Orleans and coordinating with federal and regional partners. We have not identified any specific/credible threats or any nexus to New York City at this time."

During a news conference Thursday, Lt. Crystal Fletcher with North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department told reporters that there will be an "increased security presence" at Duke's Mayo Bowl college football game on Friday in Charlotte. She declined to provide details.

Victims

Continued from Page 1NN

Usher, who owns the New Orleans-area deli where Perez worked, recounted that Perez would sometimes bring her son to work and play spelling games with him. Usher described Perez as a hard-working mother and a dedicated employee.

"She was just getting a new apartment, so her and her son were about to start their new life," Usher said. "And now that's no more."

Tiger Bech

Tiger Bech, 27, a native of nearby Lafayette, Louisiana, and a Princeton University graduate, was killed on Wednesday morning, according to Marty Cannon, the principal at the high school Bech attended. Cannon said he found out about Bech's death through his network of mutual friends and associates.

Cannon described Bech, who played football at Princeton, as an uncommon intellect and athlete.

"I've seen a lot of great athletes, but there are things that Tiger could do on the football field that I never saw anyone else do," Cannon said.

"He was just a guy of tremendous depth as well. He was smart, he was an intellectual, just an impressive guy."

Bech, who worked in finance in New York, was in town for the holidays, Cannon said.

Nikyra Cheyenne Dedeaux

Nikyra Dedeaux, 18, an aspiring nurse from Mississippi, was among those killed in the ramming attack, according to the Times-Picayune newspaper.

Dedeaux was set to begin a nursing program later in January at Blue Cliff College and was in New Orleans celebrating the New Year with a cousin and a friend, the newspaper said, citing associates of the victim.

Melissa Dedeaux, whom the Times-Picayune identified as Nikyra Dedeaux's mother, appeared to confirm her daughter's death in a widely shared Facebook post on Wednesday.

"When your parents say don't go anywhere please listen to them," Dedeaux wrote. "my baby is gone y'all. my baby is gone she is no longer with us."

Attempts to contact the elder Dedeaux and confirm her relationship to Nikyra Dedeaux were not immediately successful.

Reggie Hunter

Reggie Hunter, 37, a father of two from Baton Rouge, was among those killed, the Times-Picayune reported, citing a cousin of the victim.

The newspaper reported that Hunter, a warehouse manager, took pride in the academic achievements of his eldest son, who was of school age, and he enjoyed working out with friends and family.

Independent attempts to contact Hunter's cousin Shirell Jackson were not immediately successful.

Matthew Tenedorio

Matthew Tenedorio, 25, was an audiovisual technician at New Orleans' Caesars Superdome stadium.

His family wrote on a GoFundMe page that he was a beloved son, brother, uncle and friend, with a "laid-back spirit and infectious laughter."

At his job at the stadium, "he played a crucial role in creating memorable experiences for countless fans and event-goers," his family wrote.

His cousin Christina Colgan Bounds said on a Facebook post: "You always gave the best hugs and had the biggest smile when you walked in a room. We will miss you forever cous."

Kareem Badawi

Kareem Badawi was a student at the University of Alabama and was one of the victims of the attack, his father, Belal Badawi, said in a Facebook post.

"It is with great sadness and grief, and with hearts satisfied with Allah's decision and destiny, I announce the death of my son," his father posted on Facebook. "We ask Allah Almighty to shower his mercy on him, and give us patience and strength to overcome."

Attempts by Reuters to reach Belal Badawi were not immediately successful.

Hubert Gauthreaux

Hubert Gauthreaux, 21, graduated from the Archbishop Shaw High School in New Orleans in 2021, according to a post on the school's Facebook page. The school said he was among those "tragically killed in the senseless act of violence."

"We are asking the entire Archbishop Shaw family to pray for the repose of Hubert's soul, his family and friends during this difficult time, and all those affected by this tragedy," the school said.

Drew Dauphin

Drew Dauphin, a 2023 graduate of Auburn University was among those killed, school President Christopher Roberts announced Thursday on Facebook.

Roberts wrote: "Words cannot convey the sorrow the Auburn Family feels for Drew's family and friends during this unimaginably difficult time. Our thoughts are with the Dauphin family and the families of all the victims of this senseless tragedy."

Dozens of well-wishers posting on the site included Deavin Willett, who wrote: "He was so loved and this is such a tragic loss to all who had the pleasure of knowing him!"

IN BRIEF

Biden honors Cheney and others with Presidential Citizens Medal

WASHINGTON – Former Rep. Liz Cheney, who bucked her Republican Party to strongly criticize President-elect Donald Trump and some of his allies, was one of 20 people awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal, one of the country's highest civilian honors, by President Joe Biden on Thursday.

The medal is given to Americans for their service to the country or its citizens, the White House said.

Biden, speaking in the East Room of the White House, praised the honorees for courage, leadership, service and empathy.

"I think it's pretty damn simple: Our democracy begins and ends with the duties of citizenship," he said. "Our work continues."

The presidential medals, which go through a less rigorous approval process than Medals of Honor or acts of clemency, give a president the opportunity to honor people who have fought for causes he championed.

Cheney is a one-time Republican member of Congress who served as vice chair of the House of Representatives select committee that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters.

She received a standing ovation at Thursday's ceremony. In October, she urged Americans to reject Trump's "depraved cruelty" as she campaigned in support of Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris, who later lost to Trump.

Former US soldier accused of attempting to support Hezbollah

WASHINGTON – A Pennsylvania man who previously served in the U.S. Army was indicted by a grand jury on charges of attempting to support Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and making false statements to the FBI, the U.S. Justice Department said on Thursday.

Jack Danaher Molloy, 24, was a dual citizen of the U.S. and Ireland and traveled to Lebanon and Syria in 2024 to attempt to join Hezbollah, which is designated by the U.S. as a "foreign terrorist organization," the Justice Department said in a statement.

The department said Molloy returned to the U.S. in late 2024 and continued making attempts to join Hezbollah. He had also promoted hatred and violence against Jews, the Justice Department said, adding he was formerly enlisted as an active-duty soldier in the U.S. Army from mid-March to late April in 2019.

The Justice Department said Molloy lied to the FBI about his intentions to join Hezbollah when questioned upon his return to the United States in late 2024. It said he was arrested on Dec. 6 in Chicago.

If convicted, Molloy faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison for a material support charge. For false statement charges, he faces a maximum penalty of eight years in prison, a $250,000 fine, or both. A representative of Molloy could not immediately be contacted.

Over 300,000 migrants crossed Darien Gap in 2024, down 42%

PANAMA CITY – Over 300,000 migrants crossed the Darien Gap into Panama in 2024, 42% fewer than the record number who made the perilous jungle crossing from South America a year earlier, Panama's migration authorities told Reuters on Thursday.

The dangerous Darien Gap connects Colombia with the Central American nation of Panama and increasing numbers of migrants were making the journey north to reach the United States.

Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino has taken a harder stance on migration since taking office last July, including fencing parts of the Darien with barbed wire, imposing fines and using flights funded by the United States to deport migrants.

Officials with Panama's National Migration Service told Reuters that 302,203 migrants crossed the Darien last year, down 42% from the record 520,085 in 2023. Some 69% of migrants in 2024 were Venezuelans, they said.

Many Venezuelans have been fleeing a prolonged economic collapse in the once-prosperous South American oil-producing nation.

"We are working every day to ensure that illegal migration does not reach Panama City or the rest of the country," Mulino said in a speech to lawmakers on Thursday.

Mulino added that his government has deported 1,548 migrants on flights arranged through an agreement with the United States.

Reuters

Supreme Court's Thomas won't be referred to Justice Dept.

Nate Raymond
REUTERS

A judicial policymaking body on Thursday rejected a request by Democratic lawmakers to refer conservative U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to the Department of Justice to examine claims that he failed to disclose gifts and travel provided by a wealthy benefactor.

The secretary to the U.S. Judicial Conference, the federal judiciary's top policymaking body, in a pair of letters cited amendments Thomas had made to his annual financial disclosure reports that addressed several issues raised by Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse and Rep. Hank Johnson.

It also in a separate letter declined to refer liberal Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Justice Department based on claims by a conservative group that she failed to disclose the source of her husband's consulting income. Jackson has since amended her disclosures, the letter noted.

The Democratic lawmakers had made their request in an April 2023 letter following reports by ProPublica and others that Thomas, a member of the Supreme Court's 6-3 conservative majority, had not reported gifts including luxury travel from wealthy Texas businessman and Republican donor Harlan Crow.

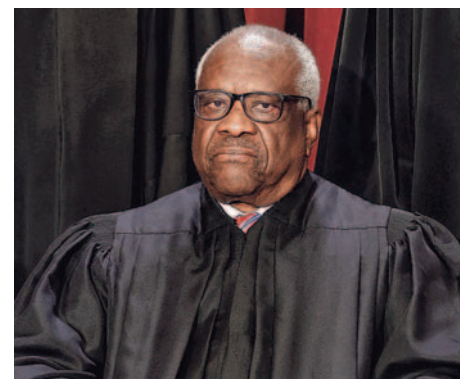
Their letter argued that a referral to the Justice Department was warranted on the grounds that Thomas had willfully failed to comply with the financial disclosure requirements of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978.

Thomas has said that he had been advised he did not have to report that type of "personal hospitality" and said he would do so going forward starting with his 2022 annual report, which was filed in August 2023.

U.S. District Judge Robert Conrad, who heads the judiciary's administrative arm and acts as the Judicial Conference's secretary, wrote that the judiciary had been busy since 2023 updating its financial disclosure requirements and making clear when the personal hospitality exemption does not apply.

He said Thomas had filed amended financial disclosure reports since the issues first emerged and that he has agreed to follow the relevant guidance issued to other federal judges, including the new policies.

"We have no reason to believe he has done anything less," Conrad wrote.



U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas has said that he had been advised he did not have to report that type of "personal hospitality."
EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

In declining to make a referral to the Justice Department, Conrad cited "constitutional questions" about whether the Judicial Conference could do so that require further study.

He also said the lawmakers' request was mooted when Whitehouse with another senator wrote directly to Attorney General Merrick Garland asking him to appoint a special counsel to investigate the same matters.

US appeals court blocks effort to restore landmark net neutrality rules

David Shepardson
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – A U.S. appeals court ruled on Thursday the Federal Communications Commission did not have legal authority to reinstate landmark net neutrality rules.

The decision is a blow to the outgoing Biden administration that had made restoring the open internet rules a priority. President Joe Biden signed a 2021 executive order encouraging the FCC to reinstate the rules.

A three-judge panel of the Cincinnati-based 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the FCC lacked authority to reinstate the rules initially implemented in 2015 by the agency under Democratic former President Barack Obama, but then repealed by the commission in 2017 under Republican former President Donald Trump.

Net neutrality rules require internet service providers to treat internet data and users equally rather than restricting access, slowing speeds or blocking content for certain users. The rules also forbid special arrangements in which ISPs give improved network speeds or access to favored users.

The court cited the Supreme Court's June decision in a case known as Loper Bright to overturn a 1984 precedent that had given deference to government agencies in interpreting laws they administer, in the latest decision to curb the authority of federal agencies.

"Applying Loper Bright means we can end the FCC's vacillations," the court ruled.

The decision leaves in place state neutrality rules adopted by California and others but may end more than 20 years of efforts to give federal regulators sweeping oversight over the internet.

Incoming FCC Chair Brendan Carr voted against the reinstatement last year and praised the decision to invalidate what he called Biden's "internet power grab." He vowed to unwind additional regulations.

FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel called on Congress to act after the decision.

"Consumers across the country have told us again and again that they want an internet that is fast, open, and fair. With this decision it is clear that Congress now needs to heed their call, take up the charge for net neutrality, and put open internet principles in federal law," Rosenworcel said in a statement.

The FCC voted in April along party lines to reassume regulatory oversight of broadband internet and reinstate open internet rules. Industry groups filed suit and successfully convinced the court to temporarily block the rules as they considered the case.

USTelecom, an industry group whose members include AT&T and Verizon, said in a joint statement with other groups that sued that the ruling is "a victory for American consumers that will lead to more investment, innovation, and competition in the dynamic digital marketplace."

FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel called on Congress to act after the net neutrality decision.
ALEX WONG/POOL VIA REUTERS FILE

Former FCC Chair Ajit Pai said the court ruling should mean the end of efforts to reinstate the rules, and a focus shift to "what actually matters to American consumers – like improving internet access and promoting online innovation."

The Trump administration is unlikely to appeal the decision but net neutrality advocates could seek review by the Supreme Court. The rules would have given the FCC new tools to crack down on Chinese telecom companies and the ability to monitor internet service outages.

A group representing companies including Amazon, Apple, Alphabet and Meta Platforms had backed the FCC net neutrality rules.

FBI shares video, seeking new leads on suspect in Jan. 6 pipe bombs

Andrew Goudsward
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – The FBI on Thursday released new surveillance video in a bid to reinvigorate its four-year hunt for a suspect who placed pipe bombs in Washington the night before the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol.

The previously unreleased footage from Jan. 5, 2021, showed an individual putting a bomb near a bench outside the Democratic National Committee building. The suspect placed another bomb at the Republican headquarters. Both sites are near the Capitol.

Police deactivated the bombs and neither exploded.

Despite receiving more than 600 tips and offering a $500,000 reward, the FBI has not been able to identify the suspect over the four years since the discovery of the bombs on the same day supporters of then-President Donald Trump stormed Congress trying to stop it from certifying his 2020 election defeat. "We're really hoping we can jog someone's memory," David Sundberg, assistant director in charge of the FBI Washington field office, said. "We do believe there are people out there who do know more than has been shared."

Security fencing encircles the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Thursday. President-elect Donald Trump's 2024 election victory is set to be certified in Congress on Monday.
EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

It is unclear if the bombs were linked to the Capitol riot, but their discovery nearby on Jan. 6, 2021, diverted police resources and remains one of the enduring mysteries of the day.

President-elect Trump's 2024 election victory is set to be certified in Congress on Monday, before he is sworn in for a second term on Jan. 20.

The FBI said the suspect was about 5 feet, 7 inches tall and released a map of the individual's walking route that night. The suspect's nondescript clothing and the 15-hour gap between the planting and the discovery of the bombs have impeded investigators.

The FBI has previously released other video of the suspect, who wore distinctive black and gray Nike Air Max Speed Turf shoes.

In the Jan. 6, 2021, melee at the Capitol, rioters surged past police barricades, assaulting about 140 officers and causing more than $2.8 million in damage. Trump has promised to pardon at least some of the nearly 1,600 people who have been criminally charged for participating in the riot.

Albania TikTok ban sparking debate

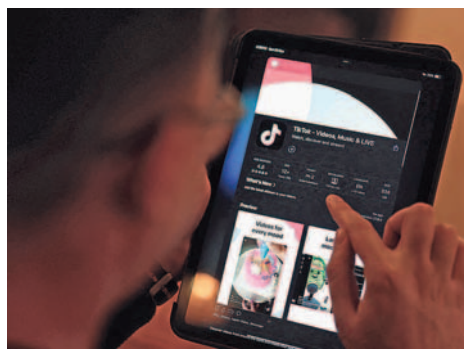
Businesses and rights groups criticize decision

Fatos Bytyci and Florion Goga
REUTERS

TIRANA, Albania – Every evening, Ergus Katiaj uploads a video on TikTok reminding customers that his shop in Tirana delivers potato chips, cigarettes and alcohol through the night. His phone buzzes with orders that add about 1,000 euros to his monthly profit.

But Katiaj will soon have to find a new way to attract business. Albania's government has imposed a yearlong ban on the social media app that it says is aimed at reducing youth violence but which rights groups and business owners say threatens commerce and free speech ahead of May elections.

"It will have a huge impact on my business because most of the sales are through delivery thanks to TikTok's free marketing," Katiaj said as he made deliveries across the outskirts of the capital.



TikTok is expected to be taken down in Albania in the coming weeks.
FLORION GOGA/REUTERS

Prime Minister Edi Rama announced the ban on Dec. 21 after a 14-year-old boy was stabbed to death in November by a fellow pupil, a crime that local media reports said occurred after the boys clashed online. TikTok is expected to be taken down in the coming weeks.

The move follows bans or partial bans in at least 20 countries due to worries about improper videos or security concerns linked to the app's owner, Chinese-based ByteDance, and its proximity to the Chinese government.

In Albania, Rama said the decision came after discussions with parents and teachers, but opponents worry that it is part of the prime minister's crackdown on political dissent after a year of popular unrest.

"This creates a dangerous precedent that at any moment governments can close different platforms," said Orkidea Xhaferaj, from the Tirana-based think tank SCiDEV.

TikTok said it was seeking "urgent clarity" from the Albanian government because it says "multiple reports have in fact confirmed videos leading up to this incident were being posted on another platform, not TikTok."

Albania saw regular violent protests last year against the jailing of political opponents. Demonstrators threw Molotov cocktails at government buildings and police responded with tear gas and water canons.

The leaders of the two biggest opposition parties, Sali Berisha of the Democratic Party and Ilir Meta of the Freedom Party, are charged with corruption offenses. They deny the charges, which they say are politically motivated.

Arlind Qori, the leader of the political party Bashke (Together) formed in 2022, said the TikTok ban curtails a powerful opposition communication tool.

"He wants to close our mouth," Qori said from his office where party supporters took refuge from the cold and discussed their campaign plans.

Rama insists the move is meant to protect young people. In an alleyway in central Tirana, a photo of the slain schoolboy hangs on an electric pole surrounded by withered flowers and messages from friends.

He was stabbed there and walked toward his school bleeding before an ambulance came.

"Inside China's TikTok, you don't see hooliganism, perversity, violence, bullying, crime," Rama said when announcing his decision last month.

"While in TikTok outside of China, only scum and scoundrels. Why do we need this?"

Israel says commandos raided Syria missile plant in September

Country says weapons planned for Hezbollah

REUTERS

JERUSALEM – Israel's military said on Thursday its special forces had raided an underground missile production site in Syria in September that it said was primed to produce hundreds of precision missiles for use against Israel by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

The complex near Masyaf, close to the Mediterranean coast, was "the flagship of Iranian manufacturing efforts in our region," Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani told a briefing with reporters.

"This facility was designed to manufacture hundreds of strategic missiles per year from start to finish, for Hezbollah to use in their aerial attacks on Israel."

He said the plant, dug into a mountainside, had been under observation by Israel since construction began in 2017 and was at the point of being able to manufacture precision-guided missiles, some with a range of up to 190 miles.

"This ability was becoming active, so we're talking about an immediate threat," he said.

Details of the Sept. 8 raid have been reported in Israeli media but Shoshani said this was the first confirmation by the military, which rarely comments on special forces operations and it was hailed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"This was one of the most important preventative operations that we have taken against the efforts of the Iranian axis to arm itself in order to attack us," he said in a statement.

Complex operation

Shoshani said the nighttime raid was "one of the more complex operations the IDF has done in recent years." Accompanied by airstrikes, it involved dozens of aircraft and around 100 helicopter-borne troops, he said.

"At the end of the raid, the troops dismantled the facility, including the machines and the manufacturing equipment, themselves," he said.

The military released footage showing Israeli troops boarding and dismounting from helicopters and moving through what appears to be a concrete-lined tunnel and industrial site, where they examine documents.

Other footage showed senior commanders at a control center, apparently as the operation proceeds.

At the time, Syrian state media said at least 16 people were killed in Israeli airstrikes in the west of the country.

Israeli officials have accused the former Syrian government of Bashar Assad of helping the Lebanese-based Hezbollah movement receive arms from Iran and say they are determined to stop the flow of weapons into Lebanon.

As Assad's government crumbled toward the end of last year, Israel launched a series of strikes against Syrian military infrastructure and weapons manufacturing sites to prevent them falling into the hands of enemies.

South Korea

Continued from Page 1NN

Media reports said the CIO vehicles did not immediately enter the compound, partly due to a bus blocking the driveway.

Some CIO officials later filed through an opened gate on foot and past the bus, but then briefly faced another bus and an armored vehicle further up the driveway, before they were moved.

It was unclear whether the Presidential Security Service, which has blocked access by investigators with a search warrant to Yoon's office and official residence, would try to stop the arrest.

Yoon's lawyer said in a statement on Friday that execution of an invalid arrest warrant against Yoon is unlawful, and they will take legal action, without elaborating.

Protesters gathered in the predawn hours near the residence, with the numbers swelling into the hundreds amid media reports that investigating authorities would soon try to execute the arrest warrant that was approved on Tuesday after Yoon refused summons to appear.

"We have to block them with our lives," one was heard saying to others.

Some chanted "President Yoon Suk Yeol will be protected by the people," and called for the head of the CIO to be arrested.

Pyeong In-su, 74, said that the police had to be stopped by "patriotic citizens," a term Yoon used to describe those standing guard near his residence.

Holding a flag of the United States and South Korea with the words "Let's go together" in English and Korean , Pyeong said he hoped incoming U.S. President Donald Trump would come to Yoon's aid.

"I hope after Trump's inauguration he can use his influence to help our country get back on the right track," he said.

The current arrest warrant is viable until Jan. 6, and gives investigators only 48 hours to hold Yoon after he is arrested.

Investigators must then decide whether to request a detention warrant or release him.

Once arrested, Yoon is expected to be held at the Seoul Detention Center, Yonhap News Agency said, citing the CIO.

Police officers drag away a pro-Yoon protester outside of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's official residence in Seoul on Friday.
KIM HONG-JI/REUTERS

Surprise martial law

Yoon sent shock waves through the country with a late-night announcement on Dec. 3 that he was imposing martial law to overcome political deadlock and root out "anti-state forces."

Within hours, however, 190 lawmakers had defied the cordons of troops and police to vote against Yoon's order. About six hours after his initial decree, Yoon rescinded it.

He later issued a defiant defense of his decision, saying domestic political opponents are sympathetic to North Korea and citing uncorroborated claims of election tampering.

Kim Yong-hyun, who resigned as Yoon's defense minister after playing a major role in the martial law decree, has been detained and was indicted last week on charges of insurrection and abuse of power.

Insurrection is one of the few criminal charges from which a South Korean president does not have immunity.

Yoon's lawyers have said the arrest warrant was illegal and invalid because the CIO did not have the authority under South Korean law to request a warrant.

Yoon has been isolated since he was impeached and suspended from power on Dec. 14.

Separate from the criminal investigation, his impeachment case is currently before the Constitutional Court to decide whether to reinstate or permanently remove him. A second hearing in that case is scheduled for later on Friday.

A spokesperson for the AfD said party leader Alice Weidel was in touch with Elon Musk's office.
ANNEGRET HILSE/REUTERS FILE

Musk likely to host German far-right leader

Report says two will talk in online chat on Jan. 10

REUTERS

BERLIN – Elon Musk looks likely to host the leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany party ahead of Germany's Feb. 23 national election in a live interview on X, his social media platform.

In December, the Tesla mogul endorsed the anti-immigration, anti-Islamic party labeled as right-wing-extremist by German security services, causing consternation in Berlin, where all other parties have ruled out working with a party they regard as dangerous and undemocratic.

A spokesperson for the Alternative for Germany, known as the AfD, said on Thursday that party leader Alice Weidel was in touch with Musk's office, but said he could give no further details at present. Earlier, news wire dpa reported the two would talk on X, Musk's social media platform, on Jan. 10.

Musk, the world's richest man, has become vocal in his support for far-right and anti-establishment parties in Europe since spending a quarter of a billion dollars to help secure Donald Trump's return to the White House.

He called German Chancellor Olaf Scholz an "incompetent fool" and said he should resign after a deadly car attack on a German Christmas market. Musk also described German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier as a "tyrant" for criticizing the AfD in a speech.

Now frequently seen with Trump, Musk has posted in support of Britain's anti-establishment Reform party as well as the AfD. Both parties are loosely influenced by economic libertarian and anti-immigration ideas.

In December, Musk hinted that an online encounter between him and the AfD's Weidel was in the works, posting that "when I and Alice do an X Spaces conversation" critics would "lose their minds."

Leaders of other parties have condemned Musk's intervention in German politics. Scholz told voters in a New Year's address that the Feb. 23 election would be decided not by billionaires but by German voters.

SPORTS EXTRA

GOLF PGA TOUR

Hot start sends Hoge to lead in '25 opener

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Tom Hoge backed off the grind recently, but he looked to be in fine form Thursday.

Hoge birdied four of his first five holes and finished with a 9-under-par 64 to grab the first-round lead at The Sentry, the PGA Tour season opener at The Plantation Course in Kapalua, Hawaii.

"There wasn't a whole lot of play or practice the last few months," Hoge said, "but felt like I was putting really well coming into the week. Started right off the bat on (No.) 1 with a nice 15-, 20-footer that I made."

And he was off to a strong round. Hoge registered 10 birdies and one bogey.

Will Zalatoris checked in with a bogey-free 8 under, and that score was matched late in the day by Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, who made a charge sparked by birdies on Nos. 14 and 16 sandwiched around an eagle 3 on No. 15.

Cameron Young, who bogeyed the first hole in an otherwise smooth round; Collin Morikawa, who didn't have a bogey; and Canada's Corey Conners, who went 4 under across the final seven holes, are next at 7 under. Morikawa recorded four consecutive birdies from No. 12 to No. 15.

Tony Finau, Canada's Adam Hadwin and Belgium's Thomas Detry share seventh place at 6 under in the 59-golfer field.

Hoge said his time off from golf was for a good reason. He became a father

See SENTRY, Page 8NS

Tom Hoge tips his cap after making his putt on the 18th hole during the first round of The Sentry on Thursday. KYLE TERADA/IMAGN IMAGES

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Notre Dame safety Xavier Watts, from left, defensive lineman Howard Cross III, linebacker Jack Kiser and quarterback Riley Leonard hold up the Sugar Bowl trophy after defeating Georgia on Thursday in New Orleans. STEPHEN LEW/IMAGN IMAGES

Triumph after tragedy

Notre Dame prevails in Sugar Bowl delayed by New Orleans terror attack

Les East
FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

NEW ORLEANS — Notre Dame passed for just 90 yards.

It had fewer total yards than Georgia (296-244).

But Jayden Harrison had a record kickoff return for a touchdown and the No. 7 seed Fighting Irish's defense dominated in a 23-10 victory over the No. 2 seed Bulldogs in a College Football Playoff quarterfinal game at the Allstate Sugar Bowl on Thursday.

"We didn't believe that we could lose this game by passing yards," Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman said, "but we could lose if we didn't stop the run, and the defense did an amazing job at stopping the run. That put them in some difficult third down situations."

Georgia rushed for 62 yards and was 2-of-12 on third downs and 0-of-3 on fourth downs.

Notre Dame's Junior Tuihalamaka (44) celebrates with RJ Oben (9) after recovering a fumble in the Sugar Bowl against Georgia. AMBER SEARLS/IMAGN IMAGES

Riley Leonard threw a 13-yard touchdown pass to Beaux Collins and rushed for a game-high 80 yards in a game that was postponed from Wednesday night because of the terrorist attack that took place in the French Quarter earlier that day.

"I'm really proud of the way they

See SUGAR BOWL, Page 2NS

Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson carries against the Texans on Dec. 25 at NRG Stadium in Houston. THOMAS SHEA/IMAGN IMAGES

NFL

Winning AFC North could be a bad idea

Nate Davis
USA TODAY

If ruling the AFC North is the NFL's version of being King in the North, then — as "Game of Thrones" has taught us — who in their right mind would want the honorific?

That will be a question the Baltimore Ravens and, perhaps, Pittsburgh Steelers must ponder now that the league has flexed their Week 18 games into its upcoming Saturday doubleheader, the Ravens hosting the Cleveland Browns at 4:30 p.m. ET, while the Cincinnati Bengals visit the Steelers for the night game. The Ravens will clinch the division and the AFC's No. 3 seed with a win. The Steelers wear the crown with a win plus a Baltimore loss. Whichever team gets the wild card will likely be the conference's fifth seed (unless Pittsburgh loses and the Los Angeles Chargers win Sunday).

Generally speaking, NFL players and coaches will usually take the public tack of embracing whomever and whatever challenges the schedule serves up. However they're far more reticent when the matter of potential manipulation of their itinerary arises. And, normally, beheading a few opponents south of the Wall (especially those like the Browns) on your way to a divisional coronation is an easy call, especially since it conveys at least a home date in the wild-card round. But this year? Particularly as it pertains to a Ravens squad that appears to be rounding into Super Bowl form, targeting that No. 5 seed and hitting the

See AFC NORTH, Page 4NS

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Arizona State-Texas showed CFP's potential

Dan Wolken
Columnist
USA TODAY

Arizona State running back Cam Skattebo has his helmet ripped off after a catch against Texas defensive back Andrew Mukuba in the fourth quarter of the Peach Bowl on Wednesday. MICHAEL CHOW/ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Welcome to the day the College Football Playoff grew up.

And also the day that proved once and for all it needs to kick the bowl games to the curb.

How great is this sport? So great that an Arizona State team held a nation spellbound for a couple of hours on Wednesday afternoon, bringing a March Madness feel to New Year's Day for the first time in CFP history.

How frustrating is this sport? So frustrating that while Arizona State was ultimately coming up one play short against Texas, the Rose Bowl couldn't see fit to delay the kickoff of Ohio State-Oregon by even a few minutes. And by the time Texas had won its quarterfinal, 39-31 in the second overtime, the Buckeyes were already up 7-0 and had the ball again.

We know the Rose Bowl loves its sunset over the San Gabriel Mountains at the start of the fourth quarter, but come on. College football is this country's second-most popular sport. It needs to act like it and not leave its programming schedule to a bunch of freeloading bowl bureaucrats who add nothing to the texture and fabric of the game in 2025.

College football is so much better than that. The Texas-Arizona State game proved it. Where's your pining for Alabama now?

After all the agenda-fueled handwringing about the first-round mismatches — led by cranky Kirk Herbstreit, of all people, who chose to be loud and wrong rather than reconsider his biases last week — it's time to separate fact from fanfic.

● The CFP does not need to be expanded to 14 or 16. Adding more teams would be a cynical money grab, and no Playoff-worthy team is getting left out of a 12-team field.

● Despite Lane Kiffin's social media sour grapes, there was no magic bullet team that could have been plugged in to the CFP to change the one-sided nature of most games that have been played so far. Not Alabama, certainly, after its no-show against Michigan in the Reliaquest Bowl. Not South Carolina. Not Miami. And not Kiffin's Ole Miss Rebels.

● The reason we have seen a lot of blowouts in the CFP, even in the four-team format, is that there's a dividing line in college football between the elite and non-elite. It would be in the best interests of the sport to shrink that gap. How do you do it? By putting a non-traditional team like Arizona State on the national stage and letting them show how good they are.

● And yet college football is so wrapped up in the idea of tradition that it has let bowl operators dictate how to run their business. So we get empty seats at Playoff games because fans can't budget for three road trips, and we get the Rose Bowl kicking off on an alternate channel because delaying by 15 minutes would be a sunset sacrilege.

Here's the point: Nobody likes to complain about college football more than people who love college football, but often their angst is misdirected.

For all the hate directed at the NIL and transfer portal environment, nothing in the history of college sports has done more to spread out talent and give dozens of programs a chance to compete for something significant.

Despite all the calls for the CFP to include the "best" teams over the most-deserving — as if Herbstreit or anyone else could accurately define what that means — how do you explain dismissed Big 12 champion Arizona State providing one of the best underdog performances in playoff history when the elitists never wanted the Sun Devils in the first place?

It's time to stop nitpicking and let college football do its thing. Does that mean every game is going to be great? Does that mean every underdog is going to look like it belongs? Of course not.

But if you just let the sport breathe a little bit, the talent gap is going to continue to close and you're eventually going to get to a place where a game like Texas-Arizona State is more the norm than the exception. Even Boise State kept things interesting Tuesday night, competing credibly with Penn State for a good portion of the game before falling 31-14.

That's all you can ask for.

Should there be some tweaks? Of course.

Oregon, as the No. 1 seed and the nation's only unbeaten team, should not have had to face Ohio State in the quarterfinals. That can be fixed by a small tweak that allows the CFP selection committee to seed the teams by their true rankings rather than giving priority to the top four conference champions.

There should also be a lengthy conversation about whether quarterfinal games should be on campus rather than neutral sites. But regardless of how that decision goes, it's time for SEC commissioner Greg Sankey, Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti and their colleagues to make it clear that the bowl games have no leverage anymore over this sport.

Think about the absurdity of this: Arizona State has a quarterfinal site in its backyard with the Fiesta Bowl but gets shipped to Atlanta to play Texas. Meanwhile, Georgia has a quarterfinal site in its backyard with the Peach Bowl but gets sent to New Orleans to play Notre Dame because of old contracts that tie conferences to particular bowls.

Meanwhile, because the Rose Bowl apparently has to kick off at 5 p.m. Eastern — and not a minute later — most people wrapped up in a truly great game on Wednesday didn't even know Ohio State-Oregon had started. Talk about giving the fans a middle finger.

But for so many years, rather than treating college football like a real sport, the powerbrokers, talking-heads bowl stooges have been in the beauty pageant mentality. It's all about "creating matchups" and "the brands" rather than, you know, playing games and showcasing new stars like ASU quarterback Sam Leavitt or coach Kenny Dillingham.

And guess what? In a real sport, you just can't predict when a game is going to be awesome or when it's going to end up lopsided.

Who could have guessed that Arizona State would be Cinderella for a few hours on New Years, while Oregon would fall flat on its face?

Lessons need to be learned from the Peach Bowl. Yeah, the Big 12 may not have been a great conference this year, but its champion went blow-for-blow with the second-best team in the SEC. And even though college football is never going to have the same upset dynamics as the NCAA basketball tournament, it's the Arizona States of the world that are going to grow this sport and turn the CFP into something magical — if they'll just leave it (mostly) alone. That's the potential we saw on Wednesday. That's the parity the CFP can help grow. That's the excitement fans yearned for when they finally turned it from an invitational into a real Playoff.

It's time for even the skeptics to admit that this thing is working just fine.

Sugar Bowl

Continued from Page 1

handled the events of the last 24 hours," Freeman said of his team, which improved to 13-1 after winning its 12th consecutive game. Georgia finished 11-3.

"You should know when you turn it over twice and they return a kickoff for a touchdown, you're not going to have a lot of success," Bulldogs coach Kirby Smart said.

Sophomore Gunner Stockton made his first start at quarterback for Georgia in place of Carson Beck, who suffered a season-ending elbow injury in the SEC championship game. Stockton completed 20 of 32 for 234 yards with one touchdown.

"Gunner did some good things," Smart said, "but obviously it wasn't enough with the two turnovers."

The Fighting Irish scored the game's first touchdown on Collins' catch with 27 seconds left in the first half and extended its lead to 20-3 when Harrison returned the second-half kickoff a CFP-record 98 yards for a touchdown.

"We just missed the tackle," Smart said, "and when you don't play for a while, sometimes you miss tackles."

The Bulldogs hadn't played since Dec. 7, when they defeated Texas 22-19 in overtime in the SEC championship. Notre Dame was coming off a 27-17 first-round home win over 10th-seeded Indiana on Dec. 20.

Stockton threw a 32-yard touchdown pass to Cash Jones to trim the lead to 10 points at the end of the third quarter.

Mitch Jeter kicked a 47-yard field goal on the third play of the fourth quarter to push the lead to 23-10. Georgia had a chance to make it a one-score game, but Stockton threw an incompletion on fourth-and-5 from the Fighting Irish 9.

The game was scoreless through one quarter. Peyton Woodring kicked a 41-yard field goal for the Bulldogs and Jeter kicked a 44-yarder to tie the score with 39 seconds left in the first half.

On the next play, RJ Oben forced Stockton to fumble while being sacked, Junior Tuihalamaka recovered for Notre Dame and Leonard and Collins teamed on their touchdown to give the Fighting Irish a 13-3 halftime lead.

"We don't play passive here," Smart said. "You can't give up possessions when you're trailing. We've got a really good pass protection team and certainly weren't counting on getting beat that quickly at left tackle, and they got a sack fumble, which gave them some momentum."

Up next for Notre Dame: vs. No. 6 seed Penn State (13-2), Orange Bowl, Jan. 9, 7:30 p.m. (College Football Playoff semifinal)

About Penn State: The Nittany Lions have won their first two playoff games decisively, defeating No. 11 seed SMU 38-10 in State College, Pa., and beating No. 3 seed Boise State 31-14 in the Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 31. The Penn State defense held Heisman Trophy runner-up Ashton Jeanty, the nation's leading rusher, to a season-low 104 yards on 30 carries and forced four turnovers in the quarterfinal victory.

Notre Dame 23, Georgia 10

Notre Dame	0	13	7	3 –	23
Georgia	0	3	7	0 –	10

Second Quarter

UGa–Peyton Woodring 41 yd FG, 12:14.
ND–Mitch Jeter 44 yd FG, 8:20.
ND–Mitch Jeter 48 yd FG, 0:39.
ND–Beaux Collins 13 yd pass from Riley Leonard (Mitch Jeter kick), 0:27.

Third Quarter

ND–Jayden Harrison 98 yd kick return (Mitch Jeter kick), 14:45.
UGa–Cash Jones 32 yd pass from Gunner Stockton (Peyton Woodring kick), 9:36.

Fourth Quarter

ND–Mitch Jeter 47 yd FG, 13:47.
A–57,267

	ND	UGa
First downs	14	16
Total Net Yards	244	296
Rushes-yards	37-154	29-62
Passing	90	234
Punt Returns	2-11	1-6
Kickoff Returns	1-98	1-19
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	15-24-0	20-32-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-11	4-37
Punts	5-43.4	4-39.8
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	3-2
Penalties-Yards	10-75	5-36
Time of Possession	31:47	28:13

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING–Notre Dame, Leonard 14-80, Price 10-37, Love 6-19, Faison 2-9, Thomas 1-7, Williams 2-4. Georgia, Etienne 11-38, Frazier 4-37, Smith 1-13, Bell 1-1, Jones 2-(minus 4), Stockton 10-(minus 23).
PASSING–Notre Dame, Leonard 15-24-0-90. Georgia, Stockton 20-32-0-234.
RECEIVING–Notre Dame, Faison 4-46, Evans 3-22, Greathouse 2-6, Williams 2-5, Collins 1-13, Harrison 1-4, Love 1-2, Leonard 1-(minus 8). Georgia, Bell 6-33, Etienne 4-26, Lovett 3-36, Jones 2-37, Delp 2-18, Frazier 2-17, Smith 1-67.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

Notre Dame receiver Jayden Harrison celebrates scoring a touchdown in the Sugar Bowl against Georgia on Thursday in New Orleans. AMBER SEARLS/IMAGN IMAGES

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

GATOR BOWL NO. 14 OLE MISS 52, DUKE 20

Rebels make statement in rout of Blue Devils

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Jaxson Dart threw four touchdown passes and Ulysses Bentley IV ran for a pair of scores as No. 14 Ole Miss overwhelmed Duke in a 52-20 Gator Bowl romp Thursday night in Jacksonville, Fla.

Coach Lane Kiffin, who expressed his displeasure regarding the College Football Playoff selections, had his team out to prove a point. The Rebels were clicking for much of the game, and they held Duke's revamped offense in check.

"This is the expectation of how we expect to play," Kiffin said. "That's 21 wins in the last two years. We're just getting started."

Dart, playing his last game before entering the NFL draft, made a good final impression as a college player by completing 27 of 35 passes for 404 yards, including a 69-yarder to Jordan Watkins for a touchdown with 1:27 left.

"I just wanted to end it the right way with my brothers, guys who started it off from Day 1," Dart said.

Watkins caught two touchdown passes and Dae'Quan Wright and Antwane Wells Jr. each had one for Ole Miss (10-3), which won five of its last six games.

Jordan Watkins was the team's top receiver with seven receptions for 180 yards.

Duke (9-4), playing under first-year coach Manny Diaz and appearing in the Gator Bowl for the first time, turned to quarterback Henry Belin IV as the starter. Maalik Murphy had departed via the transfer portal and Grayson Loftis, who was the quarterback for Duke's 2023 bowl victory, also transferred out.

Mississippi quarterback Jaxson Dart calls a play during the first quarter of the Gator Bowl on Thursday in Jacksonville, Fla. COREY PERRINE/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION

Belin was 25 of 44 for 236 yards, two touchdowns and an interception. Sahmir Hagans posted the game's last points on a 99-yard kickoff return.

"We learned a great lesson tonight, and that's what we needed ... to be in a game like this in a setting like that, against an opponent like this," Diaz said.

The Blue Devils were also without running back Star Thomas, who rushed for 871 yards during the regular season before entering the transfer portal.

Duke's Terry Moore snatched his fourth interception of the season, making a 59-yard return after picking off kicker Caden Davis' pass on a failed fake to end the game's opening possession.

However, Ole Miss stopped Duke on fourth down on the other side of the field.

The Rebels needed just four plays to go 68 yards for the game's first points on Dart's 32-yard pass play to Wells.

"They have a special quarterback who played special," Diaz said of Dart. "It has been well-documented that a lot of guys that have had careers like he has had don't play in bowl games. A lot of throws he made were elite."

Duke had a total of 36 yards on 11 first-quarter plays. But trailing 17-0, the Blue Devils marched 75 yards on eight plays to score on Belin's 16-yard pass to Javon Harvey.

The Rebels scored with 1:52 left in the half on Dart's 21-yard pass to Wright for a 24-7 halftime lead.

The second-half scoring began on Isaiah Hamilton's 50-yard interception return for a touchdown as Ole Miss led 31-7.

FIRST RESPONDER BOWL PREVIEW

Texas St. returns to face North Texas in Dallas

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

There will be a Lone Star State flair on display when North Texas battles Texas State on Friday afternoon in the First Responder Bowl at Gerald J. Ford Stadium in Dallas.

It will be the 15th rendition of the bowl and the second consecutive appearance in the game for Texas State, which beat Rice 45-21 in last year's contest.

North Texas also has played in the bowl, losing to Army 38-31 in overtime in 2016 after beating UNLV in the 2013 season.

Both head coaches in this year's game — Eric Morris of the Mean Green and GJ Kinne for the Bobcats — are native Texans, and more than three-fourths of the players on the combined rosters are from the Lone Star State.

In the lead-up to the game, both squads were hit hard by the transfer portal, with 11 players leaving from Texas State and 16 from North Texas.

The Mean Green (6-6) had to capture their season finale against Temple to earn the bowl appearance.

North Texas will be without quarterback Chandler Morris for the game. Morris, who earned third-team All-American Athletic Conference honors this season, bolted for Virginia after the regular season. Drew Mestemaker, who threw five passes while appearing in three games as a freshman this season, is expected to start behind center. He completed four passes for 69 yards.

Despite all the assumed familiarity between the teams because of their Texas-centric rosters and coaching staff, there's little for the Bobcats to glean on Mestemaker when studying tape of North Texas.

"We want to find (Mestemaker) skill sets and the things he does well and really try to force-feed him some of those things," Morris said about his quarterback. "That's the cool thing. There's no tape on Drew Mestemaker for anybody to go study right now."

Kinne wants to make sure that Texas State won't overlook the potent North Texas attack, which ranks third in the nation in total offense at 488.7 yards a game.

"Coach Morris is one of the best offensive minds in the country," Kinne said. "... It doesn't matter who is back there playing quarterback."

The Bobcats (7-5) head to Dallas after winning three of their final four games, including 45-38 at South Alabama in their final regular-season contest.

Quarterback Jordan McCloud leads the Bobcats, who rank fifth in FBS in total offense at 474.3 yards per game. McCloud has passed for 2,920 yards and 29 touchdowns with 12 interceptions, and has completed 69.6 percent of his throws.

Texas State saw five starters — running back Ismail Mahdi, wide receiver Kole Wilson, defensive tackle Dominique Ratcliff, defensive end Ben Bell and cornerback Joshua Eaton — declare for the transfer portal.

"You have some of the depth pieces," Kinne explained about the losses in the portal. "A lot of your walk-ons and a lot of guys that are looking maybe to get on scholarship somewhere. "We just did a little bit more good on good (in practice), but that's part of it."

North Texas will be without quarterback Chandler Morris, who transferred to Virginia, in the First Responder Bowl. DANNY WILD/IMAGN IMAGES

DUKE'S MAYO BOWL PREVIEW

Minnesota quarterback Max Brosmer hands the ball off to running back Darius Taylor against Wisconsin on Nov. 29. JEFF HANISCH/IMAGN IMAGES

Minnesota's bowl streak on line vs. Virginia Tech

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

History suggests that Minnesota takes bowl games more seriously than many other teams.

The Golden Gophers will put that theory to the test when they kick off against Virginia Tech on Friday night in the Duke's Mayo Bowl in Charlotte, N.C.

Minnesota (7-5) closed the regular season with five wins in seven games, including a 24-7 victory over Wisconsin in the regular-season finale.

Virginia Tech (6-6) lost three of its last four games but secured a bowl invitation with a 37-17 win against Virginia in the finale.

Minnesota coach P.J. Fleck knows he likely will deal with a short-handed roster because of injuries and opt-outs, but he is eager to maintain his program's success in the postseason. The Golden Gophers have won seven consecutive bowl games dating to the 2015 Quick Lane Bowl, which marks the longest winning streak in the nation, not including title games.

Fleck said his players are looking forward to competing on the national stage.

"One, it's a celebration of 2024, so you're preparing for an elite opponent from the ACC in Virginia Tech," he said. "Two, you want to continue to get other guys better, so it's an extension of spring ball — it's pre-spring ball.

"You want to be able to bring the floor of your program up, and you want to see who's really going to help you next year."

Virginia Tech also hopes to finish this season on a winning note and head into the 2025 season with momentum.

Hokies coach Brent Pry did not specify which players would opt out for the game, but he acknowledged that some younger and less experienced players could get an opportunity to play.

"It is challenging," Pry said. "We're going to be young in some places. We're going to be inexperienced. But to me, these bowl practices have been awesome for these guys. I'm excited about the opportunity for a bunch of them. I also think that they are getting better practice-by-practice.

"There are young guys stepping up, making plays, executing better. So I'm excited about that part. Minnesota's a really good team. They're veterans, they've got good size, they've got good experience. So it's going to be a challenge for us. But I like the way we're approaching it right now."

Minnesota quarterback Max Brosmer has committed to play in the bowl game. He threw for 2,617 yards and 17 touchdowns against five interceptions during the regular season.

Darius Taylor led the way in rushing with 873 yards and nine touchdowns.

Quarterback Kyron Drones paced Virginia Tech with 1,562 passing yards for 10 TDs, with six interceptions. He battled injuries that included a knee strain, a stress fracture and turf toe, Pry said.

Bhayshul Tuten topped the Hokies on the ground with 1,159 yards and 15 touchdowns.

NFL

NOTEBOOK

Amazon's 'TNF' sees 11% spike in ratings

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

The viewership of "Thursday Night Football" on Amazon Prime Video increased for the third straight season, up 11 percent from last season and 38 percent over the 2022 campaign.

Including the Las Vegas Raiders-Kansas City Chiefs matchup on Black Friday (average of 13.5 million viewers), the increase over last season's viewership improves to 13 percent.

The 2024 season saw Amazon's average per-game audience reach 13.2 million, per Nielsen, up from last year's 11.86 million. Two years ago, Amazon averaged 9.58 million viewers.

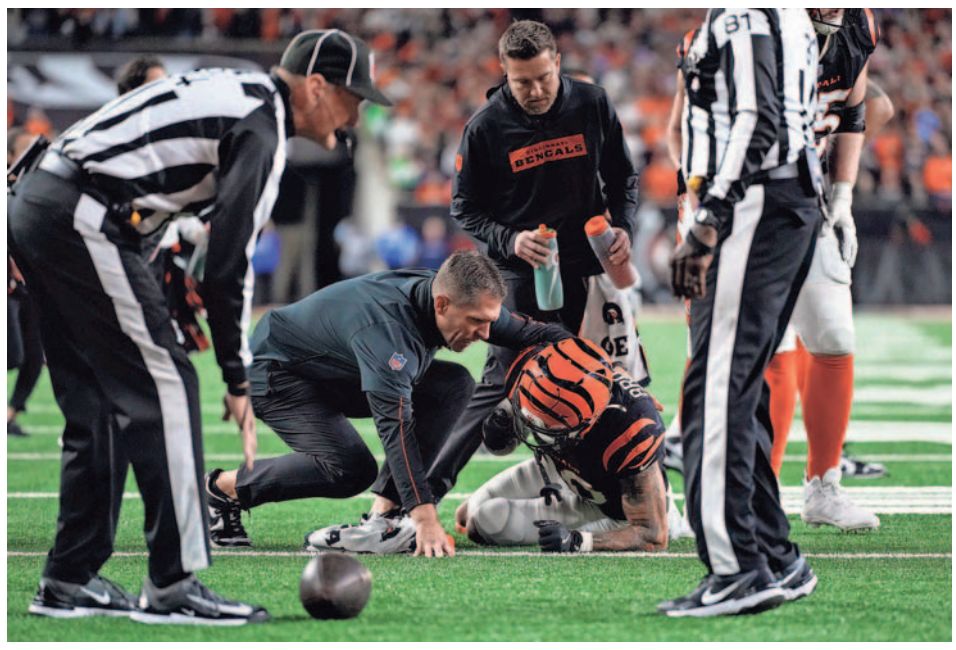
While those figures fall short of the 16.2 million viewers that Fox and NFL Network averaged on Thursday night games in 2021, they show that Amazon is making positive strides. Amazon is also bringing in a younger audience – by nearly seven years than on linear TV in general and more than 14 years than on broadcast networks (CBS, Fox and NBC).

Among viewers ages 18-34, "TNF" averaged 2.61 million viewers, an increase of 37 percent over linear TV from Thursday games in 2021. Amazon also saw an uptick in viewership among fans ages 18-49 and 25-54.

Per Nielsen, "TNF" viewers had a median household income of $101,800, a 16 percent upgrade over NFL broadcasts on linear networks.

"We could not be more proud of our partnership with the NFL, our viewership growth and the innovations we've initiated for fans and brands over these first three seasons of TNF on Prime," Prime Video global head of sports and ads Jay Marine said in a statement.

Though "TNF" is over for the season, Amazon will broadcast its first NFL wild-card game on Jan. 11 or 12. The date and game will be determined after the regular season, which ends on Sunday.



Bengals running back Chase Brown was injured on a carry in the fourth quarter of Saturday's game against the Broncos. SAM GREENE/CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

Bengals RB Brown, WR Higgins questionable vs. Steelers

Cincinnati Bengals running back Chase Brown and wide receiver Tee Higgins are listed as questionable to play on Saturday night in the season finale against the host Pittsburgh Steelers.

Brown has failed to participate in practice both days this week while nursing an ankle injury. Higgins is dealing with ankle and knee ailments.

The Bengals (8-8) need to beat the Steelers (10-6) and have the Denver Broncos and Miami Dolphins lose their respective games in order to qualify the playoffs.

Brown suffered a right ankle injury late in the fourth quarter in Cincinnati's 30-24 overtime victory over the visiting Broncos last Saturday.

On Thursday, the Bengals signed running back Kendall Milton off the practice squad. He will join Herbert and Trayveon Williams on the roster behind Brown.

Higgins, 25, is coming off his best performance of the season. He reeled in 11 catches for 131 yards and three touchdowns against the Broncos, including the winning 3-yard scoring strike in overtime.

Browns tap Zappe for finale; 40th starting QB since 1999

At the end of another unproductive season, the Cleveland Browns will turn to their fourth starting quarterback of the year and their 40th since 1999.

The Browns on Thursday named Bailey Zappe their starter for the season finale Saturday at the Baltimore Ravens.

Cleveland (3-13) has lost five straight games as Jameis Winston and Dorian Thompson-Robinson had turns under center. Winston took over for Week 1 starter Deshaun Watson, who ruptured his right Achilles tendon in October. Winston suffered an injury to his throwing shoulder, paving the way for the Browns to test out Thompson-Robinson, a fifth-round draft pick in 2023.

Coach Kevin Stefanski said Thompson-Robinson will also get some playing time Saturday.

Ravens, Lions lead selections for Pro Bowl Games

The Baltimore Ravens placed nine players on the 2025 Pro Bowl Games rosters, announced Thursday by the NFL.

The Detroit Lions also saw seven players picked, one of six teams with at least five players chosen for the event, which culminates Feb. 2 with a flag football game between the AFC and NFC in Orlando.

The Minnesota Vikings (six), Philadelphia Eagles (six), Chiefs (five) and Dallas Cowboys (five) joined the Ravens and Lions atop the list, although one player is notably absent from Kansas City's entries — quarterback Patrick Mahomes, breaking a string of six consecutive selections for the two-time NFL Most Valuable Player and three-time Super Bowl MVP.

Instead, Josh Allen of the Buffalo Bills got the nod as the AFC starter, with Jared Goff of the Lions named the starter for the NFC. Of course, both players will hope to miss the Pro Bowl Games in lieu of a run toward the Super Bowl.

Quarterback Jayden Daniels of the Washington Commanders and tight end Brock Bowers of the Las Vegas Raiders, both standout rookies, were among the Pro Bowl Games selections.

League reveals dates on franchise tags, new league year

The NFL announced several important dates that affect the league's qualifying teams for the upcoming playoffs and the 2025 season at large.

Case in point is Monday for free-agent signings and renegotiating or extending rookie contracts of a drafted rookie who was selected in any round of the 2022 NFL draft or any undrafted rookie who signed in 2023.

On Wednesday beginning at 4 p.m. ET, rosters will be frozen for clubs participating in the playoffs with limited exceptions. The first round is Jan. 11-13.

From Feb. 18-March 4, NFL clubs may designate franchise or transition players.

The NFL Scouting Combine will be held from Feb. 24-March 3 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

AFC North

Continued from Page 1

Kingsroad might be the savvier ploy for one reason ...

... The Houston Texans.

In a season when the Dallas Cowboys, New York Jets and San Francisco 49ers were all deservedly, spectacularly and repeatedly set alight by dragonfire, Houston has largely enjoyed a pass for being such a largely disappointing championship pretender. Yet for anyone who's been paying attention, the Texans have been routinely stepping in it ever since their 34-10 divisional playoff loss to the Ravens 12 months ago.

They traded a second-round draft pick for explosive receiver — and personality — Stefon Diggs in April. In fairness, Houston started 6-2 before he was lost to a torn ACL, though the competition to that point had been largely middling — a Week 5 victory over the Buffalo Bills the only one of note. And the decision to restructure Diggs' contract means he will probably amount to an eight-game rental.

GM Nick Caserio also spent heavily to sign pass rusher Danielle Hunter and linebacker Azeez Al-Shaair when he could have saved money by retaining popular Jonathan Greenard and Blake Cashman at those respective positions while simultaneously maintaining some of the chemistry from a 2023 team that has proven superior to the 2024 version. (Meanwhile, Greenard and Cashman were scooped up by the Minnesota Vikings, who have more than reaped the rewards of their additions.)

That's not all. Houston's 2024 draft class has been a mixed bag at best so far, rookie corner Kamari Lassiter the only contributor of note. Caserio saw fit to chide the media while offering a largely bizarre defense of Al-Shaair — who may, in fact, be a good guy off the field but has a deserved and documented reputation as a shady player on it — after his egregious and illegal hit on the Jacksonville Jaguars' Trevor Lawrence both concussed the quarterback and ultimately ended his 2024 season. (Al-Shaair is due back from his three-game suspension this week.)

Worst of all, opponents seem to have deciphered offensive coordinator Bobby Slowik's playbook; the O-line too often has trouble, well, blocking; and volatile running back Joe Mixon has consequently been running into walls (if not White Walkers) late in the season. All that has certainly contributed to what's been a noticeable sophomore regression for quarterback C.J. Stroud, the 2023 Offensive Rookie of the Year. (But don't worry, Caserio recently added mercurial Diontae Johnson to the mix after Baltimore dumped the wideout following a midseason trade to acquire him decidedly didn't pan out.)

Houston Texans quarterback C.J. Stroud, right, hands off to running back Joe Mixon during a Dec. 21 game against the Chiefs in Kansas City, Mo. DENNY MEDLEY/IMAGN IMAGES

It's a long way of summarizing this: Right now, you want to play the Texans, whom the Ravens just embarrassed 31-2 in front of Beyoncé, less-famous Houstonians and an international Christmas afternoon Netflix audience.

"That's not who we are. That's not what we represent," coach DeMeco Ryans said after the loss. "What we put out there on the field, that's not Texans football."

Maybe not? Yet it must be noted that the victory against Buffalo nearly three months ago remains Houston's only win against a team that's currently above .500. The Texans are 3-5 since Diggs went down.

Without the weight of the divisional scepter, Baltimore would get a rematch at NRG Stadium since Houston rules the unenviable kingdom that is the AFC South — think the Iron Islands (or a Group of Five conference, if that helps) — but nevertheless get a wild-card home game. The likely alternate opponent for winning the AFC North is the Bolts, who are something of a mirror image of the Ravens. Baltimore and Pittsburgh both won tough contests against the Chargers — a tough, physical, smart, mostly disciplined team that is going to try and bully the opposition on both sides of the ball — earlier this season and, perhaps not coincidentally, each lost their subsequent matchup ... which would be suboptimal in January. The Chargers are also getting key players back and found a semblance of a passing game in Saturday's 40-7 rout of the New England Patriots.

Trying to finagle a matchup with Houston probably wouldn't require the Ravens or Steelers to do more than rest key starters during Week 18, which also serves as an opportunity for a de facto bye for playoff entries that haven't actually earned a wholesale week off. (And, yes, it's also quite fair to ask how viable a Pittsburgh outfit that's lost three in a row — by an average margin of 16.7 points — and hasn't won during the postseason in eight years truly is and whether Mike Tomlin's team can afford to do anything other than attempt to get its mojo back Saturday.)

But Houston has a problem. Several, in fact, and winter is coming for the Texans. All that's left to learn is who will vanquish them on what could be a far more favorable path to the NFL's awaiting Iron Throne in New Orleans this February.

NHL

THURSDAY'S ROUNDUP

Ducks knock off Jets on Terry's OT winner

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Troy Terry scored his second goal of the game with 1:26 left in overtime to lift the visiting Anaheim Ducks to a 4-3 win over the Winnipeg Jets, who opened an eight-game homestand on Thursday evening.

Terry also had an assist, Radko Gudas had a goal and an assist, Leo Carlsson also scored and John Gibson made 27 saves and picked up an assist on the game-winner for the Ducks, who matched a season high with their third straight win.

Alex Iafallo had a goal and an assist, Mark Scheifele and Adam Lowry also scored, Josh Morrissey had two assists and Connor Hellebuyck made 20 saves for the Jets, who have lost two in a row (0-1-1).

Hellebuyck had won his previous six starts and was 9-0-1 in his past 10.

Anaheim Ducks right wing Troy Terry (19) scores in overtime on Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck on Thursday in Winnipeg. JAMES CAREY LAUDER/IMAGN IMAGES

Wild 4, Capitals 3, SO

Matt Boldy scored in the second round of the shootout to lift visiting Minnesota over Washington.

Boldy rebounded after hitting the post late in overtime by wristing a shot past Charlie Lindgren in the shootout. Marc-Andre Fleury preserved the win by flashing his glove to thwart Alex Ovechkin to end the game.

Ovechkin, however, scored on the power play to boost his career goal total to 871, which is 24 shy of breaking Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky's NHL record.

Ovechkin beat Fleury on a snap shot from above the left circle to forge a 2-2 tie with 4:52 remaining in the second period. The three-time Hart Trophy recipient's goal was his 28th in 47 regular-season games versus Fleury, his most against any goaltender in his career.

Canucks 4, Kraken 3, SO

J.T. Miller scored the lone shootout goal as Vancouver defeated host Seattle.

Max Sasson, Conor Garland and Tyler Myers scored in regulation for the Canucks, who won for just the second time in their past seven games (2-2-3).

Vancouver goaltender Thatcher Demko stopped 11 of 12 shots before leaving at 7:49 of the second period after sustaining an apparent lower-body injury in a collision with teammate Noah Juulsen.

Kevin Lankinen replaced Demko and made 13 saves on 15 shots the rest of the way in regulation and overtime. In the shootout, the Kraken twice missed the target, and Lankinen made one save.

Avalanche 6, Sabres 5, OT

Devon Toews scored 48 seconds into overtime, and Colorado rallied to beat Buffalo in Denver.

It was the second time this season Colorado overcame a big deficit to beat the Sabres. The Avalanche trailed 4-0 after one period in Buffalo on Dec. 3 and won 5-4, and Colorado was down 3-0 after one period and trailed 5-3 in the third on Thursday night.

Jonathan Drouin sent the game into overtime when he scored with 7.7 seconds left. Toews ended it when he got a breakaway and beat Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to extend the Avalanche's winning streak to six games.

Toews also had two assists, Cale Makar scored two goals, Mikko Rantanen and Drouin each had a goal and an assist, Ross Colton provided a goal and Nathan MacKinnon had three assists for Colorado. The Avalanche prevailed despite losing goaltender Scott Wedgewood to injury.

Red Wings 5, Blue Jackets 4

Jonatan Berggren's breakaway goal with 36 seconds left broke a tie and gave visiting Detroit a win over Columbus.

Alex DeBrincat had a goal and two assists, Dylan Larkin and Patrick Kane each collected a goal and an assist and defenseman Erik Gustafsson also scored for Detroit, which won its third straight under new coach Todd McLellan, who is 3-1 since replacing Derek Lalonde. Cam Talbot stopped 21 shots.

James van Riemsdyk had two goals and an assist, defenseman Zach Werenski tallied one goal and two assists and Sean Monahan got the other marker for Columbus. Elvis Merzlikins made 21 saves.

Berggren's goal came after he came out of the penalty box and took a pass from Tyler Motte after teammate Ben Chiarot had blocked a shot by Columbus defenseman Ivan Provorov.

Rangers 2, Bruins 1

Jonathan Quick made 32 saves and recorded his 399th career regular-season victory as host New York snapped a four-game losing streak with a victory over Boston.

Elevated to New York's No. 1 goalie for at least three games until Igor Shesterkin returns from an upper-body injury, Quick earned his first win since beating the Montreal Canadiens Nov. 30. He is one away from joining Minnesota's Marc-Andre Fleury and Florida's Sergei Bobrovsky as the third active goalie to reach 400 career wins.

After allowing 14 goals in his previous three starts, Quick helped the Rangers win for the fifth time in 20 games (5-15-0) and stop a four-game slide at home.

Mika Zibanejad and rookie Brett Berard scored 3:05 apart in the first period after the Rangers began slowly.

Maple Leafs 2, Islanders 1

Bobby McMann scored twice, including the game-winner on the power play with 2:59 left in regulation, as Toronto defeated New York in Elmont, N.Y.

McMann's third two-goal game of the season was all the support Joseph Woll (32 saves) needed. Nicholas Robertson, Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Maxi Domi each had an assist.

Scott Mayfield recorded his second goal of the season for the Islanders, with Mathew Barzal and Adam Pelech assisting. Ilya Sorokin stopped 29 shots for the Islanders, who have lost three straight (0-3-0).

Once again, special teams betrayed the Islanders, who rank last in both the power play and penalty kill. New York, which went 0-for-3 with the man advantage, last scored a power-play goal on Dec. 8, and has not scored in its last 20 chances.

Sharks 2, Lightning 1

Mario Ferraro produced a fight and the game-winning goal, Marc-Edouard Vlasic notched a point in his season debut and San Jose broke an eight-game losing streak by edging visiting Tampa Bay.

Ending an 0-7-1 streak, the Sharks beat the Lightning for just the third time in the past 14 meetings (3-10-1).

Ferraro put the home side up 2-0 in the second period after fighting with Mitchell Chaffee earlier in the frame.

Tyler Toffoli netted his team-leading 15th goal for San Jose.

Utah 5, Flames 3

Lawson Crouse scored twice, including the game-winning tally, and Clayton Keller collected one goal and one assist to lead the visiting Utah Hockey Club over Calgary.

Logan Cooley and Kevin Stenlund also scored goals while Olli Maatta netted a pair of assists for Utah, which snapped a five-game losing streak. Goaltender Karel Vejmelka made 23 saves.

Blake Coleman replied with one goal and one assist, while Connor Zary and Brayden Pachal also scored for Calgary. Goalie Dan Vladar stopped 21 shots, as well as an Alex Kerfoot penalty shot in the third period.

After twice surrendering leads, Utah cued up a third-period comeback to erase a 3-2 deficit.

Stars 4, Senators 2

Roope Hintz scored twice, including the tiebreaking goal midway through the second period, and stingy Dallas defeated Ottawa for its third straight win.

With Dallas trailing 2-1, Jamie Benn and Hintz scored in a 1:08 span of the second. Meanwhile, Jake Oettinger (11 saves) and the Stars defense got stout as they held the Senators to two shots on goal in the third period and just 13 for the game.

Matt Duchene added some third-period insurance with a goal to complement an earlier assist, while Jason Robertson and Wyatt Johnson had two helpers apiece for Dallas, which improved to 4-0-1 in its last five games.

Hurricanes 3, Panthers 1

Jaccob Slavin scored with 7:30 remaining to break a tie and lift Carolina to a victory against Florida in Sunrise, Fla., avenging two disturbing losses from last month.

Brent Burns had the first Carolina goal and Martin Necas added an empty netter with 28 seconds to play.

The Hurricanes won for only the second time in their last 10 road games (2-6-2).

Goalie Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 25 shots, helping Carolina win for just the second time in its last five games overall.

Golden Knights 5, Flyers 2

Ilya Samsonov made 23 saves to win his fifth straight start and Pavel Dorofeyev scored what proved to be the game-winner during Vegas' three-goal second period as the Golden Knights rallied to defeat visiting Philadelphia.

Mark Stone had a goal and an assist, Nicolas Hague, Alexander Holtz and Tanner Pearson also scored and Jack Eichel and Noah Hanifin each had two assists for Vegas, which improved to 5-0-1 in its past six meetings with the Flyers.

Samsonov improved to 13-2-0 all-time against Philadelphia.

THURSDAY'S SUMMARIES

Minnesota 4, Washington 3 (SO)

Minnesota	2	0	1	1 –	4
Washington	1	1	1	0 –	3

Minnesota won shootout 1-0

First Period–1, Washington, Wilson 15 (Sandin), 10:19. 1, Minnesota, Hartman 5 (Bogosian, Eriksson Ek), 11:24. 1, Minnesota, Trenin 3, 19:07. Penalties–Bogosian, MIN (Hooking), 18:12.

Second Period–1, Washington, Ovechkin 18 (Strome), 15:08. Penalties–Wilson, WSH (Roughing), 8:43. Khusnutdinov, MIN (High-sticking), 14:04.

Third Period–1, Washington, Fehervary 1 (Dubois), 5:34. 1, Minnesota, Rossi 15 (Hartman, Brodin), 11:19. Penalties–Dowd, WSH (Interference), 6:47.

Overtime–None. Penalties–None.

Shootout–Minnesota 1 (Zuccarello NG, Boldy G), Washington 0 (Strome NG, Dubois NG, Ovechkin NG).

Shots on Goal–Minnesota 11-7-14-1–33. Washington 13-7-10-1–31.

Power-play opportunities–Minnesota 0 of 2; Washington 1 of 3.

Goalies–Minnesota, Fleury 7-3-1 (31 shots-28 saves). Washington, Lindgren (33-30).

A–18,573 (18,398).

Carolina 3, Florida 1

Carolina	1	0	2	–	3
Florida	0	1	0	–	1

First Period–1, Carolina, Burns 4 (Slavin, Jarvis), 0:35. Penalties–Boqvist, FLA (Hooking), 5:44. Necas, CAR (Interference), 11:48.

Second Period–1, Florida, Lundell 9 (Boqvist, Rodrigues), 2:17. Penalties–Schmidt, FLA (Slashing), 6:34.

Third Period–1, Carolina, Slavin 2 (Kotkaniemi, Walker), 12:30. 1, Carolina, Necas 15 (Svechnikov, Staal), 19:32. Penalties–Verhaeghe, FLA (Illegal Check to Head Minor), 0:12. Smith, CAR (Interference), 2:04.

Shots on Goal–Carolina 16-16-8–40. Florida 6-9-12–27.

Power-play opportunities–Carolina 0 of 3; Florida 0 of 2.

Goalies–Carolina, Kochetkov 15-7-1 (27 shots-26 saves). Florida, Bobrovsky 17-8-1 (39-37).

A–19,434 (19,250).

Ottawa 2, Dallas 4

Ottawa	2	0	0	–	2
Dallas	1	2	1	–	4

First Period–1, Dallas, Hintz 17 (Robertson, Heiskanen), 4:39. 1, Ottawa, Tkachuk 17 (Pinto), 7:45. 1, Ottawa, Greig 6 (Tkachuk), 8:09. Penalties–Ostapchuk, OTT (Tripping), 4:07. Lundkvist, DAL (Tripping), 5:23. Stuetzle, OTT (Slashing), 9:34. Pinto, OTT (High-sticking), 11:19.

Second Period–1, Dallas, Benn 9 (Duchene, Johnston), 10:19. 2, Dallas, Hintz 18 (Robertson, Dadonov), 11:27. Penalties–Lundkvist, DAL (Tripping), 4:51.

Third Period–1, Dallas, Duchene 15 (Johnston), 13:37. Penalties–Norris, OTT (High-sticking), 0:32. Robertson, DAL (Illegal Check to Head Minor), 2:58. Reinhardt, OTT (Boarding), 5:52. Johnston, DAL (Delay of Game), 16:40.

Shots on Goal–Ottawa 6-5-2–13. Dallas 8-8-9–25.

Power-play opportunities–Ottawa 0 of 4; Dallas 1 of 5.

Goalies–Ottawa, Merilainen 2-2-0 (25 shots-21 saves). Dallas, Oettinger 18-9-1 (13-11).

A–18,532 (18,532).

Anaheim 4, Winnipeg 3 (OT)

Anaheim	1	1	1	1 –	4
Winnipeg	2	0	1	0 –	3

First Period–1, Winnipeg, Scheifele 23 (Connor, Vilardi), 0:33. 1, Winnipeg, Lowry 10 (Iafallo, Morrissey), 17:17. 1, Anaheim, Carlsson 8 (Gudas, Killorn), 18:58. Penalties–None.

Second Period–1, Anaheim, Terry 12 (Strome, Dumoulin), 6:52. Penalties–Strome, ANA (Tripping), 11:54. Strome, ANA (Cross-checking), 17:28.

Third Period–1, Winnipeg, Iafallo 6 (Niederreiter, Morrissey), 17:16. 1, Anaheim, Gudas 1 (Vatrano, Terry), 18:10. Penalties–None.

Overtime–2, Anaheim, Terry 13 (Gibson), 3:34. Penalties–None.

Shots on Goal–Anaheim 10-4-8-2–24. Winnipeg 7-12-9-2–30.

Power-play opportunities–Anaheim 0 of 0; Winnipeg 0 of 2.

Goalies–Anaheim, Gibson 6-5-1 (30 shots-27 saves). Winnipeg, Hellebuyck (24-20).

A–15,225 (15,294).

Colorado 6, Buffalo 5 (OT)

Buffalo	2	1	2	0 –	5
Colorado	0	1	4	1 –	6

First Period–1, Buffalo, Zucker 12 (Quinn, Thompson), 13:17. 1, Buffalo, Byram 5 (Zucker, Cozens), 17:10. Penalties–Manson, COL (High-sticking), 12:18.

Second Period–2, Buffalo, Zucker 13 (Thompson, Dahlin), 11:08. 1, Colorado, Makar 12 (Drouin, Toews), 14:58. Penalties–Colton, COL (Cross-checking), 10:12. Benson, BUF (Delay of Game), 17:03.

Third Period–1, Colorado, Colton 12 (Girard), 1:05. 1, Buffalo, Benson 7 (Krebs, Peterka), 1:27. 1, Colorado, Rantanen 22 (MacKinnon, Mittelstadt), 4:17. 3, Buffalo, Zucker 14 (Thompson), 16:09. 2, Colorado, Makar 13 (MacKinnon, Toews), 17:34. 1, Colorado, Drouin 3 (MacKinnon, Rantanen), 19:52. Penalties–Colorado bench, served by Innala (Delay of Game), 1:27. Tuch, BUF (Hooking), 3:04. Cozens, BUF (Tripping), 3:19. Clifton, BUF (Cross-checking), 3:45. Lehkonen, COL (Roughing), 3:45.

Overtime–1, Colorado, Toews 3, 0:48. Penalties–None.

Shots on Goal–Buffalo 10-7-4-0–21. Colorado 9-9-10-1–29.

Power-play opportunities–Buffalo 2 of 3; Colorado 1 of 3.

Goalies–Buffalo, Luukkonen (29 shots-23 saves). Colorado, Wedgewood (18-14), Blackwood 12-10-3 (3-2). A–18,081 (17,809).

N.Y. Rangers 2, Boston 1

Boston	0	1	0	–	1
N.Y. Rangers	2	0	0	–	2

First Period–1, N.Y. Rangers, Zibanejad 7 (Smith, Kreider), 9:48. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Berard 3 (Chytil), 12:53. Penalties–None.

Second Period–1, Boston, Lindholm 7 (Pastrnak, McAvoy), 7:57. Penalties–Miller, NYR (Delay of Game), 3:41. Pastrnak, BOS (High-sticking), 4:08.

Third Period–None. Penalties–None.

Shots on Goal–Boston 8-13-12–33. N.Y. Rangers 8-12-7–27.

Power-play opportunities–Boston 0 of 1; N.Y. Rangers 0 of 1.

Goalies–Boston, Swayman 13-12-3 (27 shots-25 saves). N.Y. Rangers, Quick 6-4-0 (33-32). A–18,006 (18,200).

Utah 5, Calgary 3

Utah	1	1	3	–	5
Calgary	1	2	0	–	3

First Period–1, Utah, Crouse 5 (Cole), 8:51. 1, Calgary, Coleman 9 (Kadri, Andersson), 19:12. Penalties–Coronato, CGY (Tripping), 16:17. Utah bench, served by O'Brien (Too many men), 18:36.

Second Period–1, Utah, Cooley 10 (Guenther, Keller), 6:19. 1, Calgary, Zary 10 (Sharangovich, Weegar), 7:26. 1, Calgary, Pachal 2 (Coronato, Coleman), 15:14. Penalties–Kesselring, UTA (Interference), 0:59. Kadri, CGY (Interference), 5:24. Valimaki, UTA (Tripping), 12:41. O'Brien, UTA (Misconduct), 12:41. Kadri, CGY (Misconduct), 12:41. Rooney, CGY (Slashing), 12:41. Bjugstad, UTA (Hooking), 15:55.

Third Period–1, Utah, Keller 14 (Maatta, Hayton), 0:37. 2, Utah, Crouse 6 (Bjugstad, Maatta), 2:35. 1, Utah, Stenlund 7 (Kerfoot, Sergachev), 19:00. Penalties–Pachal, CGY (Tripping), 4:32. Keller, UTA (Roughing), 10:51.

Shots on Goal–Utah 6-9-11–26. Calgary 10-10-6–26.

Power-play opportunities–Utah 1 of 3; Calgary 1 of 4.

Goalies–Utah, Vejmelka 9-10-2 (26 shots-23 saves). Calgary, Vladar 6-8-5 (25-21).

A–17,160 (19,289).

Toronto 2, N.Y. Islanders 1

Toronto	0	1	1	–	2
N.Y. Islanders	0	1	0	–	1

First Period–None. Penalties–Cizikas, NYI (Boarding), 17:06.

Second Period–1, Toronto, McMann 11 (Robertson), 10:43. 1, N.Y. Islanders, Mayfield 2 (Barzal, Pelech), 18:15. Penalties–Domi, TOR (Tripping), 12:44. Toronto bench, served by Robertson (Too many men), 14:25.

Third Period–2, Toronto, McMann 12 (Ekman-Larsson, Domi), 17:01. Penalties–McMann, TOR (Tripping), 10:18. Pelech, NYI (Tripping), 15:19.

Shots on Goal–Toronto 11-11-9–31. N.Y. Islanders 8-11-14–33.

Power-play opportunities–Toronto 1 of 2; N.Y. Islanders 0 of 3.

Goalies–Toronto, Woll 12-6-0 (33 shots-32 saves). N.Y. Islanders, Sorokin 11-13-4 (31-29). A–17,255 (17,113).

Detroit 5, Columbus 4

Detroit	3	0	2	–	5
Columbus	1	2	1	–	4

First Period–1, Columbus, van Riemsdyk 5 (Sillinger, Provorov), 2:42. 1, Detroit, Kane 8 (Copp, DeBrincat), 6:55. 1, Detroit, Gustafsson 1 (Holl), 14:39. 1, Detroit, DeBrincat 16 (Seider, Larkin), 17:09. Penalties–Detroit bench, served by Veleno (Too many men), 0:47. Voronkov, CBJ (Tripping), 12:05. Kuraly, CBJ (Tripping), 17:02.

Second Period–1, Columbus, Werenski 12, 11:09. 1, Columbus, Monahan 14 (van Riemsdyk, Werenski), 18:40. Penalties–None.

Third Period–1, Detroit, Larkin 14 (DeBrincat, Kane), 4:54. 2, Columbus, van Riemsdyk 6 (Fantilli, Werenski), 17:19. 1, Detroit, Berggren 6 (Motte, Chiarot), 19:24. Penalties–Voronkov, CBJ (Hooking), 3:58. Detroit bench, served by Berggren (Delay of Game), 17:19. Voronkov, CBJ (Cross-checking), 20:00. Werenski, CBJ (Roughing), 20:00.

Shots on Goal–Detroit 12-6-8–26. Columbus 7-5-13–25.

Power-play opportunities–Detroit 2 of 3; Columbus 1 of 2.

Goalies–Detroit, Talbot 7-9-2 (25 shots-21 saves). Columbus, Merzlikins 12-10-3 (26-21). A–18,370 (18,144).

Vegas 5, Philadelphia 2

Philadelphia	1	0	1	–	2
Vegas	0	3	2	–	5

First Period–1, Philadelphia, Foerster 11 (Cates, Brink), 0:21. Penalties–Poehling, PHI (Goaltender Interference), 17:00.

Second Period–1, Vegas, Stone 9 (Eichel, Hanifin), 0:51. 1, Vegas, Hague 3 (Kolesar), 2:13. 1, Vegas, Dorofeyev 14 (Theodore, McNabb), 18:22. Penalties–None.

Third Period–1, Vegas, Holtz 3 (Hanifin, Pietrangelo), 2:46. 1, Philadelphia, Konecny 18 (Tippett, Frost), 4:56. 1, Vegas, Pearson 8 (Stone, Eichel), 19:24. Penalties–Hanifin, VGK (Holding), 4:42. Stone, VGK (Tripping), 11:19.

Shots on Goal–Philadelphia 8-11-6–25. Vegas 4-12-11–27.

Power-play opportunities–Philadelphia 1 of 2; Vegas 0 of 1.

Goalies–Philadelphia, Kolosov 4-8-1 (26 shots-22 saves). Vegas, Samsonov 10-3-1 (25-23). A–17,909 (17,368).

Vancouver 4, Seattle 3 (SO)

Vancouver	1	1	1	1 –	4
Seattle	1	0	2	0 –	3

Vancouver won shootout 1-0

First Period–1, Seattle, Stephenson 4 (Burakovsky, Dunn), 1:52. 1, Vancouver, Sasson 2 (Heinen, Hoglander), 13:17. Penalties–Joshua, VAN (Roughing), 13:43. Montour, SEA (Roughing), 13:43. Miller, VAN (Cross-checking), 17:04. Burakovsky, SEA (Hooking), 19:15.

Second Period–1, Vancouver, Garland 10 (Di Giuseppe, Forbort), 7:49. Penalties–None.

Third Period–1, Vancouver, Myers 2 (Miller, DeBrusk), 5:35. 1, Seattle, Beniers 7 (Wright, Montour), 9:05. 1, Seattle, Dunn 8 (Burakovsky, Beniers), 19:07. Penalties–Schwartz, SEA (Tripping), 0:48. Miller, VAN (Hooking), 7:08.

Overtime–None. Penalties–None.

Shootout–Vancouver 1 (Miller G, DeBrusk NG), Seattle 0 (Bjorkstrand NG, Kakko NG, Beniers NG).

Shots on Goal–Vancouver 6-10-5-1–22. Seattle 9-10-7-1–27.

Power-play opportunities–Vancouver 0 of 2; Seattle 1 of 2.

Goalies–Vancouver, Lankinen 15-6-4 (15 shots-13 saves), Demko (12-11). Seattle, Grubauer (22-19).

A–17,151 (17,100).

San Jose 2, Tampa Bay 1

Tampa Bay	0	1	0	–	1
San Jose	1	1	0	–	2

First Period–1, San Jose, Toffoli 15 (Vlasic, Rutta), 13:52. Penalties–None.

Second Period–1, San Jose, Ferraro 3 (Granlund), 12:55. 1, Tampa Bay, Cirelli 15 (Cernak, Hagel), 17:44. Penalties–Chaffee, TBL (Fighting), 1:29. Ferraro, SJS (Fighting), 1:29. Lilleberg, TBL (Roughing), 4:22. Kunin, SJS (Tripping), 4:22. Lilleberg, TBL (Interference), 6:26. Goodrow, SJS (Tripping), 9:16. Guentzel, TBL (Hooking), 14:19.

Third Period–None. Penalties–Celebrini, SJS (Roughing), 8:09.

Shots on Goal–Tampa Bay 8-6-11–25. San Jose 9-12-4–25.

Power-play opportunities–Tampa Bay 0 of 2; San Jose 0 of 2.

Goalies–Tampa Bay, Vasilevskiy 16-11-1 (25 shots-23 saves). San Jose, Askarov 2-2-2 (25-24). A–11,103 (17,562).

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

MEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 22 Illinois goes West, routs No. 9 Oregon

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Ben Humrichous scored 14 of his 18 points in the second half Thursday night and No. 22 Illinois (10-3, 2-1) opened its first West Coast swing in the Big Ten Conference with a 109-77 beatdown of ninth-ranked Oregon (12-2, 1-2) in Eugene, Ore.

Humrichous, an Evansville transfer, sank four of the Fighting Illini's 16 3-pointers. Teammate Tre White stuffed the stat sheet with 20 points, 11 rebounds, four assists and two steals, while freshman Kasparas Jakucionis hit for 16 points and Arizona transfer Kylan Boswell added 15.

Illinois also got help in the first half from reserves Jake Davis (12 points) and Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn (11). In bagging their third straight impressive win since a two-point loss last month against No. 1 Tennessee, the Illini sank 57.5 percent of their field goals and earned a 43-31 advantage on the boards.

Four players scored in double figures for the Ducks, led by 20 points off the bench from Supreme Cook. Nate Bittle added 13, while Kwame Evans scored 11 points in a reserve role and TJ Bamba hit for 10.

Illinois forward Ben Humrichous (3) shoots over Oregon center Nate Bittle on Thursday in Eugene, Ore. CRAIG STROBECK/IMAGN IMAGES

No. 19 Gonzaga 81, Portland 50

Nolan Hickman scored 13 points and Michael Ajayi collected a season-high 15 rebounds as Gonzaga (11-4, 2-0 West Coast Conference) cruised to an easy victory over visiting Portland in Spokane, Wash.

Dusty Stromer scored a season-best 12 points as the Bulldogs defeated Portland for the 19th straight time and 39th in the last 40 meetings. Gonzaga coach Mark Few, in his 26th season, improved to 46-2 against the Pilots during his tenure.

Ryan Nembhard recorded 10 points and nine assists, and Khalif Battle and Braden Huff also had 10 points apiece for the Bulldogs.

Vincent Delano scored 12 points for the Pilots, who lost their third consecutive game.

No. 20 Purdue 81, Minnesota 61

Fletcher Loyer scored 24 points on 8-for-10 shooting, including 4-for-6 from beyond the arc, to lead Purdue (10-4, 2-1 Big Ten) to a win over Minnesota (8-6, 0-3) in Minneapolis.

Braden Smith registered 20 points, 10 assists and six rebounds for Purdue, which won its second straight game after losing the previous two. Trey Kaufman-Renn had 17 points and Caleb Furst scored 11.

Dawson Garcia had 20 points and five rebounds to lead Minnesota. Lu'Cye Patterson contributed 14 points and eight rebounds. Nobody else scored in double digits for the Golden Gophers.

Purdue shot 50 percent (29 of 58) from the field and 44 percent (11 of 25) from beyond the arc. Smith drilled five threes. Minnesota shot 48.1 percent (25 of 52) overall and 23.5 percent (4 of 17) from deep.

No. 21 Memphis 90, Florida Atlantic 62

Tyrese Hunter scored a game-high 20 points, PJ Haggerty added 19 and Memphis (11-3, 1-0) raced past Florida Atlantic (7-7, 0-1) for a win in Boca Raton, Fla., in the American Athletic Conference opener for both teams.

The Tigers kept Florida Atlantic at arm's length in the first half before Dain Dainja took over after the break. He scored all 16 of his points in the second half and all after picking up his fourth foul with under 15 minutes remaining.

Kaleb Glenn paced the Owls with 12 points to go with seven rebounds. Baba Miller added 10 points and three blocks. However, Florida Atlantic, playing for the first time in 12 days, shot just 5-for-31 (16.1 percent) from 3-point range, compared to the 10-of-18 clip (55.6 percent) by Memphis.

The first ranked to visit Florida Atlantic since 1997, Memphis built an early 14-2 lead. The Tigers racked up six offensive rebounds within the first four minutes, leading to seven second-chance points.

WOMEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

McQueen leads Clemson to upset of No. 20 Cal

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Loyal McQueen scored 18 points and Mia Moore tallied nine of her 14 in a dominant third quarter as host Clemson knocked off No. 20 Cal 69-58 in an Atlantic Coast Conference matchup on Thursday night.

Cal led by two on Ugonne Onyiah's jumper with 7:46 to play in the third, but the Tigers (9-5, 2-1 ACC) responded with a 7-0 run. Minutes later, Clemson began a quarter-closing 12-0 burst to lead 61-46 going into the fourth. Moore scored the first seven points of the latter spree.

Ioanna Krimili paced the Golden Bears (13-2, 1-1) with 18 points. Ugonne added 13 points and 10 rebounds, and Marta Suarez chipped in 12 points as Cal's seven-game winning streak ended.

Tessa Miller scored 11 points and Raven Thompson notched 10 for Clemson, which turned 15 turnovers by Cal into 23 points.

Alabama's Zaay Green (14) scores against Florida's Alexis Gassett and Jeriah Warren (20) on Thursday in in Tuscaloosa, Ala. GARY COSBY JR./USA TODAY NETWORK

No. 2 South Carolina 83, Missouri 52

The Gamecocks dominated the second half while putting away the Tigers as the teams opened Southeastern Conference play in Columbia, Mo.

MiLaysia Fulwiley scored 14 of her team-high 17 points after intermission as South Carolina broke away from a lead that was only 10 at halftime. Ashlyn Watkins finished with 11 points and 11 rebounds, Te-Hina Paopao also scored 11 points and Tessa Johnson chipped in 10 for South Carolina (13-1, 1-0 SEC).

Ashton Judd had 15 points and six rebounds for Missouri (11-5, 0-1). Grace Slaughter added 13 points.

No. 5 Texas 80, No. 9 Oklahoma 73

Jordan Lee scored nine of her 17 points in the second quarter as the Longhorns built a lead and hung on to beat the Sooners in the teams' SEC opener at Norman, Okla.

Oklahoma (12-2, 0-1) led 26-17 after one quarter, but Texas (14-1, 1-0) compiled a 23-13 advantage in the second to take a one-point lead into halftime. The lead changed hands four times late in the third quarter before the game was tied 60-60 entering the fourth.

Taylor Jones had two baskets in a 6-0 Texas run to start the fourth, and the Sooners never caught up. Oklahoma got 23 points from Payton Verhulst and 14 from Liz Scott.

No. 6 LSU 98, Arkansas 64

Flau'Jae Johnson (15 points, 10 rebounds) and Aneesah Morrow (11 points, 10 boards) each had a double-double as the Tigers blitzed the Razorbacks in the SEC opener for both teams at Fayetteville. Ark.

Kailyn Gilbert topped LSU (16-0, 1-0 SEC) with 16 points, and Mikaylah Williams scored 14.

Izzy Higginbottom produced 27 points for Arkansas (7-9, 0-1), and Carly Keats had 18. The Razorbacks were outrebounded 48-32.

No. 8 Maryland 78, Rutgers 61

Shyanne Sellers posted season bests of 22 points and eight rebounds while leading the Terrapins to a victory over the Scarlet Knights in College Park, Md.

Allie Kubek added 17 points and Kaylene Smikle contributed 13 for Maryland (13-0, 3-0 Big Ten). The Terrapins blew the game open with a 21-9 second quarter.

Destiny Adams scored 15 points and Kiyomi McMiller had 14 for Rutgers (8-6, 0-3). The Scarlet Knights outshot the Terrapins 35.5 percent to 34.8 percent from the floor, but Maryland had a 27-10 scoring edge from the foul line.

No. 13 Georgia Tech 85, Syracuse 68

Freshman Dani Carnegie came off the bench to score a career-high 28 points as the undefeated Yellow Jackets downed the Orange in Atlanta.

Carnegie hit 11 of 18 shots from the floor, including 6 of 8 from 3-point range, for Georgia Tech (15-0, 3-0 ACC). Zoesha Smith added 16 points and 12 rebounds, Tonie Morgan scored 15 points and Kara Dunn logged 14 points and eight boards.

Georgia Woolley paced Syracuse (6-7, 0-2) with 22 points. Kyra Wood finished with 12 points as the Orange's two-game winning streak ended.

No. 14 Duke 86, Boston College 59

A 19-2 second-quarter scoring explosion carried the Blue Devils past the Eagles in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

Ashlon Jackson, Taina Mair and Reigan Richardson each scored 14 points for Duke (11-3, 2-0 ACC). The Blue Devils also got double-figure contributions from reserves Oluchi Okananwa (12 points) and Toby Fournier (11 points) while bouncing back from a loss to South Florida.

Dontavia Waggoner put up a season-high 20 points for Boston College (10-6, 1-2). The Eagles were outshot 52.4 percent to 34.4 percent from the field.

No. 15 Tennessee 91, Texas A&M 78

Jewel Spear sank 6 of 8 3-point attempts and scored 20 points to power the Lady Volunteers past the Aggies in College Station, Texas.

Tennessee (13-0, 1-0 SEC) cruised in the conference opener, also getting 16 points from Talaysia Cooper, 15 from Ruby Whitehorn and 14 from Zee Spearman.

Aicha Coulibaly registered 20 points and three blocks for Texas A&M (7-6, 0-1). Sahara Jones scored 17 points and Janae Kent had 10.

No. 16 Kentucky 91, Mississippi State 69

Dazia Lawrence and Georgia Amoore each hit seven of the Wildcats' program-record 18 3-pointers, leading Kentucky to a rout of the Bulldogs in Lexington, Ky.

Lawrence finished with 28 points while Amoore had 27 points and nine assists as the Wildcats (12-1, 1-0 SEC) earned their fifth win in a row. Amelia Hassett hit three 3-pointers and wound up with 14 points, nine rebounds and five assists.

Jerkaila Jordan scored 17 points, Eniya Russell and Quanirah Montague each had 13 and Destiney McPhaul put up 10 for Mississippi State (13-2, 0-1).

No. 19 Alabama 79, Florida 69

Zaay Green scored 27 points and the Crimson Tide jumped on the Gators early and led by double digits most of the way in the Southeastern Conference opener for each team in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Green went 12 of 22 from the floor and added six assists and four rebounds. Diana Collins chipped in 12 points, Aaliyah Nye had 10 and Essence Cody supplied nine points, 11 rebounds and three blocks for Alabama (14-1, 1-0 SEC).

Liv McGill led Florida (9-6, 0-1) with 18 points. Alexia Gassett and Jeriah Warren netted 12 apiece and Ra Shaya Kyle added 11 points and 13 boards. Kyle's three-point play pulled the Gators within 76-68 with 2:30 to play, but they missed their last two shots and got no closer.

No. 25 Ole Miss 85, Auburn 58

KK Deans and Kennedy Todd-Williams set season highs with 20 and 19 points, respectively, as the Rebels clobbered the host Tigers in the Southeastern Conference opener for both squads.

Ole Miss (10-3, 1-0 SEC) shot 64.3 percent in the first quarter and took a 26-10 lead into the second. The Rebels padded their lead to 45-20 by halftime. Sira Thienou finished with 12 points and Tameiya Sadler 10 for the visitors.

DeYona Gaston, who began the night seventh in Division I in scoring at 22.7 points per game, netted 30 points on 8-of-15 shooting for Auburn (9-5, 0-1).

NBA

THURSDAY'S ROUNDUP

Thunder rally to keep winning streak alive

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

The Oklahoma City Thunder earned their 13th consecutive victory – and longest winning streak since the franchise moved to Oklahoma City – in a 116-98 win over the Los Angeles Clippers on Thursday night.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 29 points and Jalen Williams added 18 to help the Thunder move within one win of the franchise's all-time longest winning streak.

Before becoming the Thunder in 2008, the 64-18 Seattle Supersonics notched 14 straight wins during the 1995-96 season from Feb. 3 to March 6.

The Thunder, leading the NBA in points off turnovers, cranked up the heat defensively in the third quarter to take control. Oklahoma City forced seven turnovers in the third and turned those into 17 points on the other end to help them outscore the Clippers 42-20 in the frame. The Thunder scored 31 total points off turnovers in the win.

Los Angeles – missing James Harden (right groin soreness) for this contest – has lost back-to-back games. It was just Harden's second missed game of the season.

Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) shoots against Los Angeles Clippers center Ivica Zubac on Thursday in Oklahoma City. ALONZO ADAMS/IMAGN IMAGES

Warriors 139, 76ers 105

Stephen Curry added to his 3-point-shooting lore, making all eight of his attempts for the first time in his career as Golden State routed Philadelphia in San Francisco.

Curry finished with 30 points and 10 assists on a night when he became the first in NBA history to go at least 8-for-8 on 3-pointers and compile double-digit assists on the same night.

Having gone just 7 of 24 from long range over his previous two games, Curry matched his career-best of makes without a miss by going 6-for-6 through three quarters before adding two more early in the final period.

Curry had connected on all six of his 3-pointers in a game twice previously, including last April on the road against the Los Angeles Lakers.

The NBA record of 9-for-9 was originally set by former Warriors player Latrell Sprewell, then of the New York Knicks, in 2003. It was eventually matched three times – by Ben Gordon both in 2006 and 2012, and by Jalen Brunson in 2023.

Celtics 118, Timberwolves 115

Jayson Tatum scored 33 points, grabbed eight rebounds and dished nine assists, and Boston held on for a win over Minnesota in Minneapolis.

Derrick White added 26 points on 10-for-20 shooting for Boston, which won its second game in a row. Sam Hauser chipped in 15 points and Jrue Holiday scored 11.

Julius Randle had 27 points, eight rebounds and seven assists to lead Minnesota. Naz Reid finished with 20 points off the bench and Jaden McDaniels scored 19.

The Celtics won despite playing without key starters Jaylen Brown and Kristaps Porzingis. Brown was sidelined because of a right shoulder strain and Porzingis was held out because of a sprained left ankle.

Boston shot 50 percent (46 of 92) from the field and 38.6 percent (22 of 57) from beyond the arc. Minnesota shot 50.7 percent (37 of 73) overall and 55.3 percent (21 of 39) from 3-point range.

Nets 113, Bucks 110

Cameron Johnson scored 26 points and Cam Thomas added 24 as visiting Brooklyn withstood a furious fourth-quarter rally to beat Milwaukee.

The Nets led 111-90 with 6:55 remaining before missing their next 12 field-goal attempts. Damian Lillard scored five straight points to cap a 20-0 run and cut the deficit to 111-110 with 37.4 seconds remaining.

After Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo missed a layup with 6.1 seconds left, the Nets' Ziaire Williams sank two foul shots to make it a three-point game.

Lillard missed a 3-point attempt on the Bucks' next possession. Milwaukee had one final chance with 0.6 seconds left, but Lillard's 35-foot shot fell short, and Brooklyn escaped with the victory to snap a three-game losing streak.

Nic Claxton had 16 points and 11 rebounds for Brooklyn, which won the season series against the Bucks 3-1. Jalen Wilson scored 13 points, and D'Angelo Russell had 11 points and 12 assists.

Lakers 114, Trail Blazers 106

LeBron James scored 38 points with eight assists and Max Christie added a career-high 28 as Los Angeles overcame the absence of Anthony Davis to earn a victory over visiting Portland.

Austin Reaves scored 15 points with 11 assists as the Lakers won for the sixth time in their last eight games. Davis, who leads Los Angeles with 26.1 points and 11.6 rebounds, was a late scratch with a left ankle sprain.

Anfernee Simons scored 23 points, while Shaedon Sharpe and Deni Avdija each added 19 as the Trail Blazers lost for the 10th time in their last 13 games. Toumani Camara scored 18 points and Avdija added 10 rebounds for Portland, which lost its seventh consecutive road game. Two of those defeats have come against the Lakers.

Trailing by as many as seven points in the second quarter, the Lakers closed the first half on a 10-2 run to take a 60-51 lead into the break.

Christie, who is known for his defensive presence in the backcourt, scored 12 points in the second quarter alone, while James had 14 in the period.

Pacers 128, Heat 115

Tyrese Haliburton combined 33 points with a season-high 15 assists without a turnover to steer Indiana to a convincing win over host Miami.

The Pacers were untroubled from the outset as Haliburton set the tone with a 16-point, five-assist first quarter. In three meetings with Miami this season, Haliburton has 36 assists and one turnover.

Myles Turner scored 21 points and Pascal Siakam posted 18 points and 11 rebounds.

Rookie Kel'el Ware contributed a career-best 25 points on 9-of-11 shooting and added three blocks in 21 minutes off the bench for the Heat. He scored 18 in the fourth period.

Bam Adebayo finished with 20 points and eight rebounds, Tyler Herro added 17 points and Terry Rozier had 16 points and seven assists.

THURSDAY'S BOX SCORES

Oklahoma City 116, L.A. Clippers 98

L.A. CLIPPERS (98)

Coffey 10-14 0-0 26, Jones Jr. 3-7 0-0 6, Zubac 5-9 1-3 11, Dunn 3-7 0-0 8, Powell 1-11 4-5 6, Porter Jr. 3-11 5-7 11, Miller 4-8 1-2 10, Batum 0-1 0-0 0, Bamba 5-6 0-0 12, Brown 0-0 0-0 0, Hyland 1-4 0-0 2, Jones 3-3 0-0 6. Totals 38-81 11-17 98.

OKLAHOMA CITY (116)

Dort 3-7 0-0 9, Williams 8-14 1-2 18, Hartenstein 5-9 1-1 11, Gilgeous-Alexander 9-17 9-9 29, Wiggins 4-7 0-0 9, Mitchell 3-6 4-4 11, Williams 1-7 0-0 2, Joe 3-6 0-0 9, Wallace 4-6 0-0 9, Williams 2-6 1-2 7, Jones 0-0 0-2 0, Carlson 0-0 0-0 0, Dieng 1-1 0-0 2. Totals 43-86 16-20 116.

LAC	30	22	20	26	– 98
OKC	22	26	42	26	– 116

3-Point Goals: L.A. Clippers 11-32 (Coffey 6-8, Dunn 2-3, Bamba 2-3, Miller 1-5, Batum 0-1, Jones Jr. 0-2, Hyland 0-2, Porter Jr. 0-3, Powell 0-5), Oklahoma City 14-38 (Joe 3-6, Dort 3-7, Williams 2-3, Gilgeous-Alexander 2-5, Wallace 1-1, Wiggins 1-3, Williams 1-3, Mitchell 1-3, Hartenstein 0-1, Williams 0-6). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: L.A. Clippers 45 (Zubac 9), Oklahoma City 35 (Hartenstein 9). Assists: L.A. Clippers 25 (Dunn, Miller 5), Oklahoma City 29 (Gilgeous-Alexander 8). Total Fouls: L.A. Clippers 18, Oklahoma City 14. A: 18,203 (18,203)

Golden State 139, Philadelphia 105

PHILADELPHIA (105)

George 7-12 2-2 19, Martin 1-5 0-0 2, Embiid 8-19 11-14 28, Lowry 0-2 2-2 2, Maxey 4-13 4-4 14, Yabusele 4-6 4-4 13, Council IV 4-8 3-4 12, Dowtin 2-5 2-4 6, Gordon 1-2 0-0 3, Bona 0-1 0-0 0, Edwards 2-5 0-0 4, Jackson 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 34-81 28-34 105.

GOLDEN STATE (139)

Green 6-10 2-2 15, Wiggins 6-11 2-2 15, Jackson-Davis 1-5 1-2 3, Curry 11-15 0-0 30, Schroder 5-9 2-2 15, Kuminga 8-11 2-3 20, Hield 1-5 0-0 3, Waters III 4-7 0-0 10, Moody 4-5 0-0 12, Anderson 3-3 2-3 8, Looney 3-3 0-1 6, Spencer 0-1 0-0 0, Santos 1-2 0-0 2. Totals 53-87 11-15 139.

PHI	19	33	26	27	– 105
GSW	35	33	35	36	– 139

3-Point Goals: Philadelphia 9-31 (George 3-6, Maxey 2-6, Gordon 1-2, Yabusele 1-2, Embiid 1-3, Council IV 1-4, Lowry 0-1, Jackson 0-2, Martin 0-2, Edwards 0-3), Golden State 22-39 (Curry 8-8, Moody 4-5, Schroder 3-4, Kuminga 2-3, Waters III 2-4, Wiggins 1-4, Green 1-5, Hield 1-5, Santos 0-1). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Philadelphia 33 (Embiid 14), Golden State 43 (Wiggins 7). Assists: Philadelphia 16 (Maxey 6), Golden State 42 (Curry 10). Total Fouls: Philadelphia 16, Golden State 22. A: 18,064 (18,064)

Indiana 128, Miami 115

INDIANA (128)

Mathurin 5-12 1-1 12, Siakam 8-13 1-4 18, Turner 8-15 3-4 21, Haliburton 13-21 1-3 33, Nembhard 3-7 0-0 6, Toppin 5-9 0-0 12, Sheppard 1-3 0-0 3, McConnell 4-7 0-0 8, Walker 3-6 3-4 12, Bryant 1-3 0-0 3, Furphy 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 51-96 9-16 128.

MIAMI (115)

Butler 3-6 2-2 9, Highsmith 3-4 0-0 6, Adebayo 8-12 4-6 20, Herro 6-12 2-2 17, Robinson 2-5 0-0 6, Rozier 6-12 4-4 16, Jovic 3-7 2-2 8, Ware 9-11 4-5 25, Jaquez Jr. 0-3 0-0 0, Johnson 2-2 0-0 5, Burks 1-1 0-0 3, Christopher 0-0 0-0 0, Larsson 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 43-75 18-21 115.

IND	38	28	41	21	– 128
MIA	25	25	33	32	– 115

3-Point Goals: Indiana 17-40 (Haliburton 6-13, Walker 3-3, Toppin 2-4, Turner 2-5, Siakam 1-2, Bryant 1-3, Sheppard 1-3, Mathurin 1-5, Nembhard 0-2), Miami 11-26 (Ware 3-4, Herro 3-7, Robinson 2-4, Burks 1-1, Johnson 1-1, Butler 1-2, Adebayo 0-1, Highsmith 0-1, Jovic 0-2, Rozier 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Indiana 39 (Siakam 11), Miami 39 (Adebayo 8). Assists: Indiana 35 (Haliburton 15), Miami 34 (Rozier 7). Total Fouls: Indiana 16, Miami 13. A: 19,959 (19,600)

Brooklyn 113, Milwaukee 110

BROOKLYN (113)

Johnson 10-16 0-0 26, Wilson 6-13 0-0 13, Claxton 5-9 6-8 16, Johnson 3-7 2-3 9, Russell 3-11 5-5 11, Thomas 8-22 6-6 24, Sharpe 1-3 4-4 6, Williams 2-5 2-2 8, Martin 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 38-88 25-28 113.

MILWAUKEE (110)

Antetokounmpo 12-24 3-10 27, Middleton 6-11 0-0 12, Lopez 3-4 1-2 7, Jackson Jr. 1-1 0-0 2, Lillard 6-20 7-8 23, Portis 4-9 4-4 15, Trent Jr. 2-8 4-4 10, Rollins 2-4 0-0 4, Prince 3-6 0-0 8, Connaughton 1-3 0-0 2, Beauchamp 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 40-90 19-28 110.

BKN	30	36	28	19	– 113
MIL	23	31	31	25	– 110

3-Point Goals: Brooklyn 12-39 (Johnson 6-12, Williams 2-4, Thomas 2-11, Johnson 1-2, Wilson 1-4, Martin 0-1, Sharpe 0-1, Russell 0-4), Milwaukee 11-37 (Lillard 4-13, Portis 3-4, Prince 2-5, Trent Jr. 2-7, Lopez 0-1, Connaughton 0-2, Rollins 0-2, Middleton 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Brooklyn 51 (Claxton 11), Milwaukee 46 (Antetokounmpo 13). Assists: Brooklyn 26 (Russell 12), Milwaukee 21 (Antetokounmpo, Lillard 7). Total Fouls: Brooklyn 21, Milwaukee 21. A: 17,341 (17,500)

Boston 118, Minnesota 115

BOSTON (118)

Hauser 5-11 0-0 15, Tatum 13-27 1-2 33, Horford 4-8 0-0 9, Holiday 4-9 0-0 11, White 10-20 1-1 26, Pritchard 3-8 1-2 9, Queta 4-5 0-0 8, Kornet 3-3 1-1 7, Walsh 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 46-92 4-6 118.

MINNESOTA (115)

McDaniels 6-12 3-3 19, Randle 9-16 4-4 27, Gobert 3-5 0-0 6, Conley 2-4 0-0 5, Edwards 5-16 3-4 15, DiVincenzo 3-5 3-3 12, Reid 6-11 4-4 20, Alexander-Walker 1-2 1-2 4, Minott 2-3 2-2 7. Totals 37-74 20-22 115.

BOS	28	34	29	27	– 118
MIN	35	16	34	30	– 115

3-Point Goals: Boston 22-57 (Tatum 6-17, White 5-10, Hauser 5-11, Holiday 3-7, Pritchard 2-6, Horford 1-5, Walsh 0-1), Minnesota 21-39 (Randle 5-7, Reid 4-5, McDaniels 4-8, DiVincenzo 3-5, Edwards 2-9, Alexander-Walker 1-1, Conley 1-2, Minott 1-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Boston 31 (Tatum 8), Minnesota 41 (McDaniels, Randle 8). Assists: Boston 30 (Tatum 9), Minnesota 24 (Randle 7). Total Fouls: Boston 16, Minnesota 11. A: 18,978 (19,356)

L.A. Lakers 114, Portland 106

PORTLAND (106)

Avdija 8-14 2-2 19, Camara 8-13 0-0 18, Ayton 3-4 0-0 6, Sharpe 6-16 6-8 19, Simons 8-17 3-3 23, Henderson 4-7 3-4 12, Clingan 1-2 2-2 4, Murray 1-3 1-2 3, Banton 1-4 0-0 2. Totals 40-80 17-21 106.

L.A. LAKERS (114)

Hachimura 2-6 2-2 6, James 15-25 1-2 38, Hayes 2-4 0-0 4, Christie 9-16 5-5 28, Reaves 5-15 3-3 15, Finney-Smith 1-6 0-0 3, Reddish 1-3 0-0 2, Koloko 4-8 0-0 8, Knecht 2-6 2-2 6, Milton 2-5 0-0 4. Totals 43-94 13-14 114.

POR	31	20	24	31	– 106
LAL	27	33	28	26	– 114

3-Point Goals: Portland 9-26 (Simons 4-9, Camara 2-4, Henderson 1-2, Avdija 1-3, Sharpe 1-5, Ayton 0-1, Murray 0-2), L.A. Lakers 15-43 (James 7-10, Christie 5-9, Reaves 2-9, Finney-Smith 1-4, Reddish 0-1, Milton 0-3, Knecht 0-3, Hachimura 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Portland 42 (Avdija 10), L.A. Lakers 43 (Koloko, Reaves 8). Assists: Portland 24 (Henderson 8), L.A. Lakers 30 (Reaves 11). Total Fouls: Portland 15, L.A. Lakers 17. A: 17,812 (18,997)

NOTEBOOK

Antetokounmpo and Jokic lead All-Star fan voting

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic and Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo lead the Western and Eastern Conferences, respectively, in the first fan returns for 2025 NBA All-Star voting released Thursday.

Joining Jokic (West frontcourt) and Antetokounmpo (East frontcourt) as top vote-getters at their respective position groups are the Oklahoma City Thunder's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (West guard) and the Charlotte Hornets' LaMelo Ball (East guard).

Antetokounmpo has the most overall votes with 1.71 million and Jokic ranks second with 1.42 million.

Fans account for 50 percent of the vote to determine the starters for the NBA All-Star Game, scheduled for Feb. 16 at the Chase Center in San Francisco. Current NBA players and a media panel account for 25 percent each.

The Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo, top, and the Nuggets' Nikola Jokic lead the All-Star Game fan voting. CHRIS HUMPHREYS/USA TODAY SPORTS

Friday marks the next "3-for-1 Day," when each fan vote counts triple. The next fan voting update will be on Jan. 9.

Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James ranks third in the West frontcourt with 1.17 million votes. The others with more than 1 million votes so far are Gilgeous-Alexander, Kevin Durant (Phoenix Suns), Jayson Tatum (Boston Celtics) and Karl-Anthony Towns (New York Knicks).

Pistons G Ivey has fractured fibula

Detroit Pistons guard Jaden Ivey suffered a broken left fibula in a collision with the Orlando Magic's Cole Anthony, the team confirmed.

Ivey was injured when Anthony fell into his plant leg as the two went after a loose ball with 10:07 remaining in the fourth quarter of the Pistons' 105-96 victory over the Magic on Wednesday. Ivey was writhing in pain on the floor following the play and was taken from the court on a stretcher.

The Pistons said Ivey underwent successful surgery Thursday morning at Detroit's Henry Ford Hospital and he will be re-evaluated in four weeks.

Prior to the injury, Ivey recorded 22 points on 8-for-11 shooting from the floor and 5-for-6 from 3-point range in the game.

"It's tough on the whole group," teammate Cade Cunningham said after the game, per the Detroit Free Press. "To see him hurting like that is tough on us. He's built for it, he's going to shake back knowing him. He's going to work his tail off and he's going to be better than ever when he gets back."

Ivey is second on the team in scoring with a career-high 17.6 points to go along with 4.1 rebounds and 4.0 assists in 30 games (all starts) this season. He is shooting 46.0 percent from the floor and 40.9 percent from 3-point range.

TENNIS ROUNDUP

Poland advances to semis of United Cup

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Poland secured its place in the semifinals of the United Cup with a victory over Great Britain on Thursday in Australia.

Hubert Hurkacz got Poland, the second seed, off to a lead in the mixed-team event with a 7-6 (3), 7-5 defeat of Billy Harris. Iga Swiatek nailed the victory with a 6-7 (4), 6-1, 6-4 win against Katie Boulter and the sixth-seeded Brits in their first career meeting.

Poland, which lost to Germany in the championship round of the United Cup last year, will meet Kazakhstan in one semifinal on Saturday. The United States will face the winner of Friday's contest between Italy and Czechia in the other semifinal.

Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return to Britain's Katie Boulter during their women's singles match at the United Cup on Thursday in Sydney, Austrailia. DAVID GRAY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Brisbane International

Top seed Novak Djokovic reached the quarterfinals with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Gael Monfils, sending him to a 20-0 career record against the Frenchman.

The first victory for Djokovic, 37, against Monfils, now, 38, came at the U.S. Open in 2005.

Djokovic, of Serbia, will meet Reilly Opelka in the quarterfinals in Australia. Opelka was a 7-6 (9), 7-6 (4) winner over Italy's Matteo Arnaldi.

Also advancing were Czech Jakub Mensik, who defeated Dusan Lajovic of Serbia 6-3, 6-2, and Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, who beat fourth-seeded Frances Tiafoe 6-4, 7-6 (4).

Hong Kong Open

Hungarian Fabian Marozsan upset top-seeded Russian Andrey Rublev 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 to move to the quarterfinals in Hong Kong.

Marozsan will meet Chinese left-hander Juncheng Shang after the latter's victory over Pedro Martinez of Spain 6-3, 6-1.

Also advancing were second seed Lorenzo Musetti of Italy, who dispatched Gabriel Diallo of Canada 6-4, 6-3, and Jaume Munar of Spain, who upset fifth-seeded Nuno Borges of Portugal.

Women
Brisbane International

No. 1 seed Aryna Sabalenka overcame a spirited challenge from 15th-seeded Yulia Putintseva to record a 7-6 (2), 6-4 win in a Round of 16 match.

Sabalenka, of Belarus, rallied from down 5-3 in the first set and finished with six aces to dispatch the Russian-born Kazakhstani in 1 hour and 49 minutes.

While Sabalenka advanced, third-seeded Daria Kasatkina of Russia and 10th-seeded Victoria Azarenka of Belarus were not as fortunate. Polina Kudermetova of Russia posted a 1-6, 6-2, 7-5 win over Kasatkina and Czech Marie Bouzkova secured a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Azarenka. Eighth-seeded Russian Mirra Andreeva dispatched Czech Linda Noskova, the No. 12 seed, 6-3, 6-0 in 63 minutes.

Also on Thursday, Ons Jabeur of Tunisia collected a 6-4, 1-6, 6-4 win over Elina Avanesyan of Armenia.

Anhelina Kalinina of the Ukraine cruised to a 6-1, 6-4 win over Yuan Yue of China.

Ashlyn Kreuger seized a 7-5, 6-0 victory over Suzan Lamens of the Netherlands and Australian Kimberly Birrell notched a 7-6 (2), 6-2 win over Anastasia Potapova of Russia.

ASB Classic

Top-seeded Madison Keys cruised into the quarterfinals with a 6-1, 6-2 win over Jaqueline Cristian of Romania in Auckland, New Zealand.

Keys fired three aces and took advantage of five double faults to dispatch Cristian in 67 minutes and set up a match versus fifth-seeded Clara Tauson of Denmark.

Fellow Americans Hailey Baptiste, Alycia Parks and Robin Montgomery also were victorious on Thursday.

Baptiste overcame a first-set stumble to notch a 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (6) win over Jodie Burrage of Great Britain, Parks secured a 7-5, 6-3 victory over Greet Minnen of Belgium and Montgomery breezed to a 6-2, 6-2 triumph over Nao Hibino of Japan.

Will Zalatoris hits his fairway shot on the fourth hole during the first round of The Sentry on Thursday in Kapalua, Hawaii. KYLE TERADA/IMAGN IMAGES

Sentry

Continued from Page 1NS

for the first time in early December.

"Needed a little bit of time away," he said.

Based on his first round, Hoge received positive vibes with the launch of a new season.

"I think when we kind of start off the year, expectations aren't as high, you don't know where the game's at," Hoge said. "So I feel like I'm maybe a little bit freer out here on the golf course, just because you shake off the bad shots a little bit easier and just chalk it up for being January."

Zalatoris took a different approach. He said he was constantly working the past couple of months on improving and testing himself on the course.

"I wanted to just get back to playing the game," he said. "... So that's the recipe. I don't need to be sitting on the range hitting 300 balls trying to find it, I need to go back out there and play the game."

There also was off-the-course work for Zalatoris, who has added muscle.

"I knew I needed to get stronger," he said. "It wasn't so much about the speed, I know that the speed will come, I needed the stability to make sure that I was able to do what I'm doing."

Morikawa will want to keep the momentum he built on the back nine during the Thursday round. He said the conditions are suitable for more low scores.

"If you're hitting it good, you can make a lot of birdies," he said. "I think this course has shown that."

Forty golfers finished under par and another seven at even-par 73.

"There's certain courses where you feel like you can birdie every hole," Morikawa said. "It's not like a forced thing that you can have happen, but I feel like out here, you hit some good approach shots, you can make some putts, and thankfully I've made a lot of putts throughout the years."

Defending champion Chris Kirk shot 74 with two double bogeys and is tied for 48th place.

World No. 1 golfer Scottie Scheffler isn't participating in the select field as he recently underwent hand surgery. He had broken glass in his right palm following a Christmas Day accident.

NASCAR CUP SERIES

Smith returns to drive Front Row's 3rd Cup car

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Zane Smith will drive the No. 38 Ford as Front Row Motorsports' third NASCAR Cup Series entry in 2025.

The team announced a multiyear agreement with the former Truck Series champion on Thursday.

Front Row Motorsports purchased the charter for a third vehicle from now-defunct Stewart-Haas Racing.

Smith, 25, joined FRM in 2022 and captured the Truck Series championship that season, the company's first title.

He won six truck races across the 2022-23 seasons — including Daytona both years — and was hoping to move full-time to the Cup Series in 2024.

"Unfortunately, everyone had to make tough decisions because there were only two Cup cars available at Front Row Motorsports going into last season when I was ready," Smith said in a news release.

"Now, going into next year, Front Row has really taken their Cup program to another level and I cannot think of a better lineup of teammates.

"Todd (Gilliland) and Noah (Gragson) are great friends of mine and we all have a lot to prove as young drivers in the Cup Series. It is a great time to come back and continue to build my career with an organization where I know I can win."

Smith returns to FRM after spending the 2024 season driving the No. 71 Chevrolet for Spire Motorsports, posting four top-10 finishes in 36 races. The rookie's best finish was a runner-up effort at Nashville on June 30.

"We want to welcome Zane back to Front Row Motorsports," team owner Bob Jenkins said in a release. "He brought us our first championship and we believe that he can win in the NASCAR Cup Series, too. We have always believed in his talents, and we will work hard to give him what he needs to be successful. We have confidence in Zane.

"This finalizes our drivers for 2025 in the Cup Series and we can now make all our teams as strong as possible. We have come a long way, but there is a lot more ground to make up, too. We now have the drivers who can build on where we are today and take us to the next level."

Smith finished 30th in the Cup Series points standings. FRM's Gilliland placed 22nd and Gragson was 24th driving for Stewart-Haas Racing.

Zane Smith, shown on Nov. 9, will drive the No. 38 Ford as Front Row Motorsports' third NASCAR Cup Series entry in 2025. MARK J. REBILAS/IMAGN IMAGES

SCOREBOARD

BETMGM

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Odds available as of print deadline.

NFL

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
BALTIMORE	17.5	42	Cleveland
Cincinnati	1.5	48.5	PITTSBURGH

Sunday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
ATLANTA	8.5	48	Carolina
Washington	4.5	44	DALLAS
GREEN BAY	9	40.5	Chicago
INDIANAPOLIS	5	45.5	Jacksonville
Buffalo	3	38	NEW ENGLND
PHILADELPHIA	3	38.5	NY Giants
TAMPA BAY	13	43.5	New Orleans
ARIZONA	3	44	San Francisco
DENVER	10	39	Kansas City
Seattle	4	39.5	LA RAMS
LA Chargers	5.5	41	LAS VEGAS
Miami	1.5	39.5	NY JETS
DETROIT	2.5	57.5	Minnesota

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Friday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
TEXAS ST.	13.5	61	North Texas
Minnesota	8	42.5	VA. TECH

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Buffalo	2.5	51	LIBERTY

Monday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
MONTANA ST.	3.5	56.5	North Dakota St.

All times Eastern

NFL

American Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	13	3	0	.813	509	345
Miami	8	8	0	.500	325	332
N.Y. Jets	4	12	0	.250	306	384
New England	3	13	0	.188	266	401

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Baltimore	11	5	0	.688	483	351
Pittsburgh	10	6	0	.625	363	328
Cincinnati	8	8	0	.500	453	417
Cleveland	3	13	0	.188	248	400

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	9	7	0	.563	349	358
Indianapolis	7	9	0	.438	351	404
Jacksonville	4	12	0	.250	297	409
Tennessee	3	13	0	.188	297	437

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	15	1	0	.938	385	288
L.A. Chargers	10	6	0	.625	368	281
Denver	9	7	0	.563	387	311
Las Vegas	4	12	0	.250	289	400

National Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	13	3	0	.813	443	290
Washington	11	5	0	.688	462	372
Dallas	7	9	0	.438	331	445
N.Y. Giants	3	13	0	.188	260	395

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	14	2	0	.875	533	333
Minnesota	14	2	0	.875	423	301
Green Bay	11	5	0	.688	438	314
Chicago	4	12	0	.250	286	348

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	9	7	0	.563	475	366
Atlanta	8	8	0	.500	351	379
New Orleans	5	11	0	.313	319	371
Carolina	4	12	0	.250	297	496

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	10	6	0	.625	342	356
Seattle	9	7	0	.563	345	343
Arizona	7	9	0	.438	353	355
San Francisco	6	10	0	.375	365	389

Saturday's Games

Cleveland at Baltimore, 4:30 p.m.
Cincinnati at Pittsburgh, 8 p.m.

Sunday's Games

Carolina at Atlanta, 1 p.m.
Washington at Dallas, 1 p.m.
Chicago at Green Bay, 1 p.m.
Jacksonville at Indianapolis, 1 p.m.
Buffalo at New England, 1 p.m.
N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia, 1 p.m.
New Orleans at Tampa Bay, 1 p.m.
Houston at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
San Francisco at Arizona, 4:25 p.m.
Kansas City at Denver, 4:25 p.m.
Seattle at L.A. Rams, 4:25 p.m.
L.A. Chargers at Las Vegas, 4:25 p.m.
Miami at N.Y. Jets, 4:25 p.m.
Minnesota at Detroit, 8:20 p.m.

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	25	9	.735	–
N.Y. Knicks	24	10	.706	1
Philadelphia	13	19	.406	11
Brooklyn	13	21	.382	12
Toronto	8	26	.235	17

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	20	15	.571	–
Miami	17	15	.531	1½
Atlanta	18	16	.529	1½
Charlotte	7	25	.219	11½
Washington	6	25	.194	12

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	29	4	.879	–
Milwaukee	17	15	.531	11½
Indiana	17	18	.486	13
Detroit	15	18	.455	14
Chicago	15	19	.441	14½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	23	11	.676	–
Houston	22	11	.667	½
Dallas	20	14	.588	3
San Antonio	17	16	.515	5½
New Orleans	5	29	.147	18

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	28	5	.848	–
Denver	19	13	.594	8½
Minnesota	17	16	.515	11
Portland	11	22	.333	17
Utah	7	25	.219	20½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	19	14	.576	–
L.A. Clippers	19	15	.559	½
Golden State	17	16	.515	2
Phoenix	15	17	.469	3½
Sacramento	15	19	.441	4½

Thursday's Scores

Indiana 128, Miami 115
Boston 118, Minnesota 115
Brooklyn 113, Milwaukee 110
Oklahoma City 116, L.A. Clippers 98
Golden State 139, Philadelphia 105
L.A. Lakers 114, Portland 106

Friday's Games

Charlotte at Detroit, 7 p.m.
Orlando at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.
Boston at Houston, 8 p.m.
Washington at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
N.Y. Knicks at Oklahoma City, 8 p.m.
Cleveland at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.
San Antonio at Denver, 9 p.m.
Memphis at Sacramento, 10 p.m.
Atlanta at L.A. Lakers, 10:30 p.m.

Saturday's Games

Philadelphia at Brooklyn, 6 p.m.
Minnesota at Detroit, 7 p.m.
Phoenix at Indiana, 7 p.m.
N.Y. Knicks at Chicago, 8 p.m.
Denver at San Antonio, 8 p.m.
Utah at Miami, 8 p.m.
Portland at Milwaukee, 8 p.m.
Memphis at Golden State, 8:30 p.m.
Atlanta at L.A. Clippers, 10:30 p.m.

League Leaders

Scoring Averages

	GP	PTS	AVG
Antetokounmpo, MIL	25	815	32.6
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	32	1000	31.3
Jokic, DEN	29	890	30.7
Tatum, BOS	30	849	28.3
Fox, SAC	34	910	26.8
Davis, LAL	31	809	26.1
Maxey, PHI	25	648	25.9
Wembanyama, SAS	28	716	25.6
Brunson, NYK	33	833	25.2
Lillard, MIL	24	604	25.2
Towns, NYK	32	798	24.9
Edwards, MIN	32	792	24.8
Booker, PHX	27	668	24.7
Wagner, ORL	25	610	24.4
Brown, BOS	28	683	24.4
Irving, DAL	30	729	24.3
Herro, MIA	31	753	24.3
Powell, LAC	26	631	24.3
Cunningham, DET	29	690	23.8
Mitchell, CLE	32	757	23.7

Field-Goal Percentage

	FG	FGA	PCT
Gafford, DAL	161	225	.716
Allen, CLE	185	266	.695
Gobert, MIN	127	201	.632
Antetokounmpo, MIL	318	521	.610
Zubac, LAC	224	367	.610
Sabonis, SAC	253	426	.594
Poeltl, TOR	186	314	.592
Capela, ATL	144	249	.578
Hart, NYK	180	314	.573
Mobley, CLE	220	386	.570
Ayton, POR	157	277	.567
Braun, DEN	169	299	.565
Jokic, DEN	338	601	.562
Wagner, ORL	140	249	.562
Vucevic, CHI	271	485	.559
Valanciunas, WAS	152	273	.557
Thompson, HOU	148	266	.556
Butler, MIA	125	226	.553
McConnell, IND	163	296	.551
Towns, NYK	285	520	.548

Free-Throw Percentage

	FT	FTA	PCT
Embiid, PHI	82	88	.932
Curry, GSW	84	91	.923
Lillard, MIL	152	165	.921
Valanciunas, WAS	63	69	.913
Garland, CLE	90	99	.909
Suggs, ORL	97	107	.907
Booker, PHX	175	194	.902
Simons, POR	73	81	.901
Murphy III, NOP	72	80	.900
Irving, DAL	98	109	.899
Miller, CHA	61	68	.897
Sexton, UTA	94	105	.895
Johnson, BKN	111	124	.895
Bridges, CHA	59	66	.894
Markkanen, UTA	122	137	.891
Harden, LAC	210	236	.890
Dick, TOR	88	99	.889
White, CHI	93	105	.886
Wagner, ORL	119	135	.881
Wembanyama, SAS	109	124	.879

3-Point Field Goal Percentage

	3FG	3FGA	PCT
Jokic, DEN	65	131	.496
LeVert, CLE	49	104	.471
Hunter, ATL	64	140	.457
Prince, MIL	52	114	.456
Mathews, ATL	54	119	.454
Powell, LAC	97	215	.451
Kennard, MEM	43	96	.448
LaVine, CHI	96	216	.444
Alexander-Walker, MIN	55	124	.444
Green, MIL	68	154	.442
Irving, DAL	93	211	.441
O'Neale, PHX	78	177	.441
Vucevic, CHI	70	159	.440
Towns, NYK	70	159	.440
Siakam, IND	67	153	.438
Hachimura, LAL	42	96	.438
Sexton, UTA	63	144	.438
Jones, PHX	73	168	.435
Johnson, BKN	99	229	.432
Battle, TOR	44	102	.431

Rebounds Per Game

	GP	OFF	DEF	TOT	AVG
Sabonis, SAC	31	119	309	428	13.8
Towns, NYK	32	92	347	439	13.7
Jokic, DEN	29	100	277	377	13.0
Zubac, LAC	33	131	282	413	12.5
Antetokounmpo, MIL	25	50	240	290	11.6
Davis, LAL	31	79	280	359	11.6
Kessler, UTA	26	102	181	283	10.9
Poeltl, TOR	29	113	202	315	10.9
Sengun, HOU	33	113	240	353	10.7
Gobert, MIN	32	109	229	338	10.6
Johnson, ATL	31	57	260	317	10.2
Ayton, POR	23	69	165	234	10.2
Allen, CLE	33	76	257	333	10.1
Vucevic, CHI	33	71	261	332	10.1
Wembanyama, SAS	28	51	229	280	10.0
Adebayo, MIA	31	74	233	307	9.9
Tatum, BOS	30	19	267	286	9.5
Nurkic, PHX	23	44	175	219	9.5
Duren, DET	30	91	185	276	9.2
Capela, ATL	34	114	195	309	9.1

Assists Per Game

	GP	AST	AVG
Young, ATL	32	384	12.0
Jokic, DEN	29	282	9.7
Cunningham, DET	29	280	9.7
James, LAL	29	259	8.9
Haliburton, IND	34	294	8.7
Paul, SAS	33	273	8.3
Harden, LAC	32	248	7.8
Brunson, NYK	33	252	7.6
Lillard, MIL	24	182	7.6
Simmons, BKN	26	179	6.9
Giddey, CHI	30	205	6.8
Garland, CLE	32	215	6.7
Westbrook, DEN	32	212	6.6
Booker, PHX	27	175	6.5
Curry, GSW	26	166	6.4
Jones, PHX	32	201	6.3
Murray, DEN	26	162	6.2
Fox, SAC	34	211	6.2
Barrett, TOR	27	167	6.2
Sabonis, SAC	31	190	6.1

Steals Per Game

	GP	STL	AVG
Daniels, ATL	30	93	3.10
Maxey, PHI	25	52	2.08
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	32	62	1.94
Eason, HOU	24	46	1.92
Williams, OKC	32	57	1.78
Wallace, OKC	31	55	1.77
Dunn, LAC	33	57	1.73
Wagner, ORL	25	43	1.72
Jokic, DEN	29	49	1.69
Westbrook, DEN	32	54	1.69
Poole, WAS	27	45	1.67
Caldwell-Pope, ORL	34	56	1.65
Fox, SAC	34	54	1.59
Johnson, ATL	31	48	1.55
VanVleet, HOU	31	48	1.55
Murray, DEN	26	40	1.54
Paul, SAS	33	50	1.52
Mitchell, CLE	32	48	1.50
Anunoby, NYK	34	51	1.50
Suggs, ORL	33	49	1.48

Blocks Per Game

	GP	BLK	Avg.
Wembanyama, SAS	28	110	3.93
Kessler, UTA	26	70	2.69
Davis, LAL	31	63	2.03
Turner, IND	32	65	2.03
Lopez, MIL	31	60	1.94
Sarr, WAS	28	48	1.71
Lively II, DAL	26	44	1.69
Jackson Jr., MEM	32	54	1.69
Clingan, POR	25	41	1.64
Bitadze, ORL	30	48	1.60
Mobley, CLE	31	46	1.48
Antetokounmpo, MIL	25	36	1.44
Gobert, MIN	32	46	1.44
Gafford, DAL	33	47	1.42
Missi, NOP	33	46	1.39
Poeltl, TOR	29	38	1.31
Isaac, ORL	29	36	1.24
Stewart, DET	29	35	1.21
White, BOS	32	37	1.16
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	32	37	1.16

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	24	13	2	50	120	107
Florida	23	14	2	48	132	122
Boston	20	16	4	44	103	120
Tampa Bay	20	13	2	42	135	99
Ottawa	19	16	2	40	112	107
Montreal	17	17	3	37	113	127
Detroit	16	18	4	36	103	124
Buffalo	14	20	5	33	121	134

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	25	10	3	53	138	100
New Jersey	24	14	3	51	132	104
Carolina	23	13	2	48	131	107
Pittsburgh	17	17	5	39	120	145
Columbus	16	17	6	38	131	141
Philadelphia	17	18	4	38	121	141
N.Y. Rangers	17	19	1	35	103	114
N.Y. Islanders	14	18	7	35	103	124

Western Conference

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	27	11	2	56	145	100
Minnesota	24	11	4	52	117	107
Colorado	24	15	0	48	136	128
Dallas	23	13	1	47	120	93
Utah	17	15	6	40	111	115
St. Louis	18	17	4	40	106	117
Nashville	11	20	7	29	91	122
Chicago	12	24	2	26	96	129

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	26	9	3	55	136	104
L.A. Kings	22	10	5	49	116	95
Edmonton	22	12	3	47	121	105
Vancouver	18	11	8	44	116	118
Calgary	18	13	7	43	104	116
Seattle	17	19	3	37	114	123
Anaheim	16	17	4	36	95	114
San Jose	12	23	6	30	107	147

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Thursday's Scores

Minnesota 4, Washington 3, SO
N.Y. Rangers 2, Boston 1
Carolina 3, Florida 1
Detroit 5, Columbus 4
Toronto 2, N.Y. Islanders 1
Dallas 4, Ottawa 2
Anaheim 4, Winnipeg 3, OT
Colorado 6, Buffalo 5, OT
Utah 5, Calgary 3
Vegas 5, Philadelphia 2
Vancouver 4, Seattle 3, SO
San Jose 2, Tampa Bay 1

Friday's Games

Pittsburgh at Florida, 7 p.m.
Montreal at Chicago, 8 p.m.
Ottawa at St. Louis, 8 p.m.
Anaheim at Edmonton, 9 p.m.
Nashville at Vancouver, 10 p.m.

Saturday's Games

N.Y. Rangers at Washington, noon
New Jersey at San Jose, 4 p.m.
Montreal at Colorado, 7 p.m.
Detroit at Winnipeg, 7 p.m.
Boston at Toronto, 7 p.m.
Minnesota at Carolina, 7 p.m.
St. Louis at Columbus, 7 p.m.
Utah at Dallas, 8 p.m.
Tampa Bay at L.A. Kings, 9 p.m.
Nashville at Calgary, 10 p.m.
Buffalo at Vegas, 10 p.m.
Edmonton at Seattle, 10 p.m.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

College Football Playoff Matchups

Quarterfinals

Fiesta Bowl: No. 6 Penn State 31, No. 3 Boise State 14
Peach Bowl: No. 5 Texas 39, No. 4 Arizona State 31, 2 OT
Sugar Bowl: No. 7 Notre Dame 23, No. 2 Georgia 10
Rose Bowl: No. 8 Ohio State 41, No. 1 Oregon 21

Bowl Schedule

Tuesday, Dec. 17

Scooters Coffee Frisco Bowl: Memphis 42, West Virginia 37

Wednesday, Dec. 18

RoofClaim.com Boca Raton Bowl: James Madison 27, Western Kentucky 17
LA Bowl hosted by Gronk: UNLV 24, California 13

Thursday, Dec. 19

R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl: Sam Houston 31, Georgia Southern 26

Friday, Dec. 20

StaffDNA Cure Bowl: Ohio 30, Jacksonville State 27
Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl: Florida 33, Tulane 8

Monday, Dec. 23

Myrtle Beach Bowl: UTSA 44, Coastal Carolina 15
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl: Northern Illinois 28, Fresno State 20, OT

Tuesday, Dec. 24

Hawaii Bowl: South Florida 41, San Jose State 39, 5OT

Thursday, Dec. 26

GameAbove Sports Bowl: Toledo 48, Pittsburgh 46, 6OT
Rate Bowl: Kansas State 44, Rutgers 41
68 Ventures Bowl: Arkansas State 38, Bowling Green 31

Friday, Dec. 27

Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl: Navy 21, Oklahoma 20
Birmingham Bowl: Vanderbilt 35, Georgia Tech 27
AutoZone Liberty Bowl: Arkansas 39, Texas Tech 26
DIRECTV Holiday Bowl: Syracuse 52, Washington State 35
SRS Distribution Las Vegas Bowl: USC 35, Texas A&M 31

Saturday, Dec. 28

Wasabi Fenway Bowl: Connecticut 27, North Carolina 14
Bad Boy Mowers Pinstripe Bowl: Nebraska 20, Boston College 15
Isleta New Mexico Bowl: TCU 34, Louisiana 3
Pop-Tarts Bowl: Iowa State 42, Miami (FL) 41
Snoop Dogg Arizona Bowl: Miami (OH) 43, Colorado State 17
Military Bowl Presented by GoBowling.com: East Carolina 26, North Carolina State 21
Valero Alamo Bowl: BYU 36, Colorado 14
Radiance Technologies Independence Bowl: Army 27, Louisiana Tech 6

Monday, Dec. 30

TransPerfect Music City Bowl: Missouri 27, Iowa 24

Tuesday, Dec. 31

ReliaQuest Bowl: Michigan 19, Alabama 13
Tony the Tiger Sun Bowl: Louisville 35, Washington 34
Cheez-It Citrus Bowl: Illinois 21, South Carolina 17
Kinders Texas Bowl: LSU 44, Baylor 31

Thursday, Jan. 2

Taxslayer Gator Bowl: Ole Miss 52, Duke 20

Friday, Jan. 3

SERVPRO First Responder Bowl: North Texas vs Texas State at Dallas, 4 p.m.
Duke's Mayo Bowl: Minnesota vs Virginia Tech at Charlotte, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 4

Bahamas Bowl: Buffalo vs Liberty at Nassau, 11 a.m.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Thursday's Men's Scores

East

Holy Cross 74, Loyola Maryland 72
Troy 69, App State 61
Western Kentucky 71, Liberty 70
James Madison 83, Southern Miss 72
Arkansas State 78, Old Dominion 59
Queens University 96, Stetson 87
Campbell 57, Drexel 54
William & Mary 74, Hofstra 56
Towson 65, UNCW 61
Northeastern 80, Delaware 77
Marshall 77, Texas State 71
Elon 75, North Carolina A&T 67
Monmouth 78, Stony Brook 56
Navy 81, American University 58
Penn State 84, Northwestern 80
High Point 76, Radford 58
Lafayette 60, Boston University 46
Lehigh 66, Bucknell 64
Colgate 71, Army West Point 59

Southeast

Charleston Southern 72, Gardner-Webb 63
Austin Peay 97, North Florida 89
Presbyterian 68, Longwood 60
Winthrop 95, USC Upstate 76
Lipscomb 70, Jacksonville 65
North Alabama 82, Bellarmine 66
Louisiana 71, Coastal Carolina 68
Georgia Southern 90, ULM 82
South Alabama 77, Georgia State 51
Charleston 94, Hampton 67
FGCU 79, West Georgia 68
Memphis 90, Florida Atlantic 62
Middle Tennessee 73, FIU 69
Illinois State 74, Murray State 68
Eastern Kentucky 89, Central Arkansas 83
Southeast Missouri State 67, Tennessee State 65
Little Rock 57, UT Martin 56
Tennessee Tech 68, Southern Indiana 64

Midwest

Detroit 78, Robert Morris 76
Oakland 65, Milwaukee 49
Wright State 74, Green Bay 51
Omaha 95, North Dakota 85
St. Thomas (MN) 89, North Dakota State 85
Kansas City 68, South Dakota 54
Purdue 81, Minnesota 61
Eastern Illinois 78, Lindenwood 74
Indiana 84, Rutgers 74
SIUE 77, Western Illinois 66
South Dakota State 91, Denver 70

West

Idaho State 72, Northern Arizona 67
Northern Colorado 89, Weber State 72
UC Irvine 98, Cal Poly 89
Montana 92, Eastern Washington 81
Idaho 69, Montana State 64
New Mexico State 75, Sam Houston 71
UTEP 70, Louisiana Tech 60
Gonzaga 81, Portland 50
Bakersfield 75, UC Davis 64
Washington 75, Maryland 69
Loyola Marymount 82, Oregon State 61
CSUN 95, Cal State Fullerton 65
UC Riverside 76, Long Beach State 60
San Francisco 89, Pacific 81
Saint Mary's 71, Pepperdine 41
Santa Clara 81, San Diego 80
Illinois 109, Oregon 77

Friday's Men's Games

East

Fairfield vs Merrimack at North Andover, 3 p.m.
Marist at Iona, 7 p.m.
Stonehill at Mercyhurst, 7 p.m.
Central Connecticut State at Saint Francis U, 7 p.m.
Manhattan at Siena, 7 p.m.
Chicago State at Wagner, 7 p.m.
Quinnipiac at Saint Peter's, 7 p.m.
Le Moyne at LIU, 7 p.m.
Wichita State at Temple, 7 p.m.
Xavier at Georgetown, 8 p.m.

Midwest

Akron at Bowling Green, 6 p.m.
Iowa at Wisconsin, 7 p.m.
Michigan State at Ohio State, 8 p.m.

West

UC Santa Barbara at Hawaii, midnight

USA TODAY Sports Coaches Poll

Dec. 30

The USA TODAY Sports Men's Basketball Coaches Poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen in consultation with the National Association of Basketball Coaches. The voters represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. Tennessee (20)	12-0	764	1
2. Auburn (11)	11-1	747	2
3. Iowa State	10-1	707	3
4. Duke	10-2	664	4
5. Florida	13-0	651	5
6. Alabama	11-2	626	6
7. Kansas	9-2	552	7
8. Marquette	11-2	539	8
9. Oregon	12-1	491	9
10. Oklahoma	13-0	437	11
11. Kentucky	10-2	428	10
12. Texas A&M	11-2	424	13
13. UConn	10-3	416	14
14. Houston	8-3	386	12
15. Michigan St.	10-2	270	18
16. Mississippi St.	11-1	267	19
17. Cincinnati	10-1	259	17
18. UCLA	11-2	255	21
19. Gonzaga	9-4	170	15
20. Illinois	9-3	129	22
21. Baylor	8-3	113	23
22. Purdue	9-4	108	25
23. Ole Miss	11-2	92	16
24. Maryland	11-2	90	NR
25. Memphis	10-3	87	NR

Others receiving votes: St. John's 70; Arkansas 58; Drake 53; Michigan 49; Utah State 42; Georgia 36; San Diego State 30; Dayton 19; Texas Tech 12; Pittsburgh 10; Clemson 9; West Virginia 8; Missouri 6; North Carolina 1.

USA TODAY Sports Women's Coaches Poll

Dec. 31

The USA TODAY Sports women's basketball coaches poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. The members represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. UCLA (31)	13-0	775	1
2. South Carolina	12-1	741	2
3. Notre Dame	11-2	678	4
4. LSU	15-0	677	3
5. USC	12-1	659	5
6. Texas	13-1	621	6
7. Maryland	12-0	572	8
8. UConn	11-2	559	7
9. Ohio State	13-0	526	9
10. Oklahoma	12-1	498	10
11. Kansas State	13-1	461	11
12. TCU	13-1	431	12
13. Tennessee	12-0	384	13
14. Georgia Tech	14-0	355	16
15. Duke	10-3	344	14
16. Kentucky	11-1	319	15
17. North Carolina	13-2	284	17
18. West Virginia	10-2	229	18
19. N.C. State	10-3	181	20
20. Alabama	13-1	178	21
21. Michigan State	11-2	161	19
22. Iowa	11-2	118	22
23. California	13-1	95	24
24. Baylor	11-2	87	23
25. Ole Miss	9-3	27	NR

Others receiving votes: Mississippi State 25, Utah 23, Vanderbilt 23, Michigan 15, Illinois 13, Florida State 11, George Mason 4, Nebraska 1

GOLF

The Sentry
Thursday
Kapalua, Hawaii
Plantation Course at Kapalua
Purse: $20 million
Yardage: 7,596; Par: 73
First Round

Tom Hoge ....64–64 (-9)
Hideki Matsuyama ....65–65 (-8)
Will Zalatoris ....65–65 (-8)
Corey Conners ....66–66 (-7)
Collin Morikawa ....66–66 (-7)
Cameron Young ....66–66 (